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Milo Romer, THE ANIMAL KING; OR, The Round the World Wanderer.

A Romance of Every Clime.

BY CAPTAIN FREDERICK WHITTAKER.

CHAPTER I. THE TORNADO.

"Look! Isn't it grand, Louis?"

"A little too grand. I wish we were out of its way," responded Louis Bonnelle, uneasily.

Albert Austin, artist and journalist, only laughed as he looked. He loved to see everything at any hazard; and the sight before them was enough to set an artist wild.

They were alone in a remote valley of the Adirondacks. Before them lay a lake, smooth as a mirror; reflecting in its clear depths, every leaf of the noble

trees that clothed the encircling peaks, to their very summits.

And right over against them, through a gap in the mountains, the afternoon sun was blazing above a towering mass of blue-black clouds that looked as if they were cut out of velvet and bordered with gold.

All round them everything was hushed in the intense stillness of a sultry day in the wilderness. Not a bird sung, not a leaf rustled.

"Let the storm come when it will," quoth the enthusiastic artist. "We can at least enjoy *this* while it lasts."

As if to answer his words, a deep rumble came from the bosom of the black cloud, and three white streaks went zigzagging across its face, followed by a sudden splitting clap of thunder, multiplied by thousands of echoes among the mountains.

And at the same moment the tip of the black cloud rose partly over the face of the sun, and a shadow crept over the valley.

A little later, and Louis called out to his companion, who had taken his seat on a fallen tree, and was eagerly sketching the advance of the storm:

"Good heavens, Austin, don't you see it's a tornado coming right over us? We must get out of this at once, or we will be drenched to the skin or struck by lightning!"

Albert Austin looked up with the same bright smile as before.

"I know it, old fellow, but it's too late to run. We can't get out in time, and I'm bound to finish this sketch."

He went on with the calm rapidity of of a professional who understands his work, while Louis Bonnelle, growing more and more uneasy, watched the dark cloud advancing.

Already a murky gloom was stealing over the silent landscape, and the cloud was nearly overhead; still Albert Austin never stirred till his companion seized him by the arm, and pointed to the rift in the mountains, saying, in a low tone:

"Look! look!"

Austin closed his book, placed it securely in his waterproof case, and arose with a sort of sigh.

"I see it," he said. "What a pity we are not weather-proof! I'd like to paint the whole thing."

A gray sheet of falling rain now hid the lower part of the oncoming cloud, and a deep roaring sound, very different from thunder, was becoming louder and louder.

Already the tops of the mountains were hidden, and they could see the trees, at the edges of the gray rain sheet, bend over and fall in rows, as if under a mower's scythe.



THERE WERE THREE OR FOUR BEARS AND A HALF-DOZEN WOLVES, ALL SWIMMING, OPEN-MOUTHED, AFTER THE CANOE.

"By Jove, Louis, it is a tornado," observed the artist, with a little more uneasiness than he had hitherto shown. "I thought it was only going to be a thunder-storm."

"And what are we going to do?" asked Louis, rather snappishly.

"Just what we should do anywhere else; get under shelter," was the reply. "You see that group of rocks? that will save us if I don't mistake. Run, old fellow."

The first huge drops of rain quickened the movements of the two young men, and though they had but a hundred yards or so to run, they were nearly drenched before they could reach the rocks.

And then down came the storm in all its fury on the valley. The flashes of lightning were incessant and blinding, while the thunder was one continuous peal; and, louder than all, came the howling of the tornado, sweeping its zigzag path through the woods and over the lake, and leveling huge trees like stems of grass.

Well was it that the sharp eyes of the artist had noted the rocks to which they had fled, for nothing less solid could have resisted the mighty sweep of the tempest.

They crouched side by side in a crevice and felt the solid pinnacles tremble, while all round them the trees went down in rows.

A huge fragment of granite, weighing many tons, was torn from the top of the pinnacle and carried fifty feet away, rolling over and over like a pebble.

In one place the storm made a swirl, caught up great oak trees bodily into the air, twisting and writhing in the embrace of the tornado, and hurled them in fragments against the mountain.

Then down came the rain, hiding the landscape, and Albert Austin said, in a pause of the thunder: "The worst's over, Louis. It's lucky these tornadoes don't last long."

And, sure enough, after some ten minutes of rain, coming down in solid sheets, a glow of yellow light shot across the scene, and presently they saw the ragged edges of the cloud flying to the east over the mountains, while a cool breeze followed the storm, and the birds began to sing out their joy at the passing of the hurricane.

The two young men came forth from their shelter and looked over the valley on a scene of destruction over which the setting sun shed a sea of orange light. They could see the track of the tornado, to and fro across the forests, where it had cut roads from mountain to mountain, leaving a tangle of fallen trees and great brown pits where trees had once stood.

The little lake, lately so pure and glassy, was now a sea of brownish gray, where the blast had swept over it, licking it up till the mud on its bottom had risen in clouds to the surface.

And amid all this desolation, with streams of turbid water pouring down from every crag, the two friends realized that the sun was setting, and that there was every prospect of their passing the night in the wilderness.

Not but what both had done that many a time; but it was under very different circumstances.

Camp in the Adirondacks on a hot night in July, with a skillful guide to make a fire, with plenty of bacon, flour, coffee, trout or venison in the larder, is a very pleasant thing.

But, camp in the Adirondacks, for two strangers who have lost their way, by the banks of a strange lake, where everything is wet and firewood a matter of almost unattainability; camp for two city-bred men who have not a dozen matches between them and nothing to cook after the fire gets lighted; such a camp is not pleasant.

So Louis Bonnelle thought, and said: "What in the world are we to do for a bed and supper, Austin?"

Austin laughed. Nothing disconcerted the merry young artist.

"You have a fishing-rod," he said, "and I have a pipe and matches. Therefore we can get a fire and some fish out of the lake. The best thing we can do is to go down there as soon as we can. These lonely lakes are always full of fish."

"I wish John Davis was here," grumbled Bonnelle, who seemed to be something of a spoiled child. "I hate to be put to so much trouble. We shall never be able to make a fire with this wet wood."

"Leave me alone for that," said Austin, good-humoredly. "You haven't been obliged to rough it as I have, Bonnelle, or you wouldn't give up so easily. One thing's certain—there's no hotel in this valley, and what we do we must do before the sun goes down. Come on!"

As they thread their way down through the tangle of fallen trees, a few words may serve to explain who they are and how they came to be there.

Louis Bonnelle is the son of a man of wealth, and has never known a want as far as money went. His friend has had to fight the world for everything, from bare support as a boy up to artistic education. Yet to-day Austin is happy, Louis fretful and full of discontent. He has found one want which his father's wealth cannot supply.

A girl so beautiful that he raved about her from the moment he first met her has refused his love, in spite of all his wealth; yet she is only a performer in a roving show, with no dower but her virtue.

So that Louis Bonnelle is miserable, and having lost his love, has come to the woods with his friend Austin, to forget it if he can, under the advice of his father.

As for Albert Austin, he is care-free, and only ambitious to paint the best picture of the century, especially a battle-piece, for he has lately returned from the Turkish war, where he has been special artist for a great paper, and now is enjoying himself to his heart's content.

After a great deal of scrambling and grumbling from Louis they came to the borders of the lake, when Albert said in his cheery way:

"Now then, out with your flies and see what you can do, or we shall go hungry to bed. I'll see to the fire and a place to sleep."

He was a man of ready resources, who always went to the woods prepared for a camp.

In his artist's bag, besides colors and pencils, he carried a big knife; and at his waist, in a leathern belt, always hung a keen little hatchet, while, being a smoker, he was never without a match.

He rummaged about on the underside of old trees which his experienced eye told him had long been dead for dry chips to start a fire, and soon had a heap of punk and little splinters of wood on a stone by the beach, to keep his fire out of the wet.

But with all his skill he could coax nothing but smoke out of such materials on such a day, and he was bustling about for something drier, when he uttered an exclamation of wonder and joy:

"Hallo! Louis!" he cried. "Here's a canoe hid away in the bushes. By Jove, we must be near some hunter's cabin, and this is his canoe."

Louis dropped his rod and came scrambling toward his friend, and presently they hauled out of the brushwood a neat and prettily-modeled canoe, hollowed out of a single log, with a single paddle tied to its seat.

It was not the ordinary boat used in the Adirondacks by the guides, but something much more primitive; and both young men examined it curiously, though the light was fast fading away.

"Here's the man's boat; but where's the man, Louis? I'm afraid he's gone away from home, or his canoe would not be here."

As if for answer to Albert's query, at that moment the gleam of a light shone from the edge of the lake, about half a mile away, and Louis Bonnelle cried out:

"Thank Heaven, we'll have some supper at last. To tell you the truth, I've not caught a single fish."

"Then the sooner we get into this canoe and paddle over to see our friend the better," observed Austin, as he shoved the bow of the canoe into the lake.

They stepped in with all their scanty belongings, Austin took up the paddle, and they glided slowly away over the dark waters of the lake toward the light that twinkled at the other side.

After they had gone a little distance, Austin stopped paddling.

"Seems to me I heard a wolf," he said.

They listened, and, sure enough, the long, quavering howl of a wolf came down the breeze toward them, from the direction of the light, seemingly close to it.

Louis Bonnelle, who had never heard wolves before, became nervous.

"Are you sure there's no danger?" he asked.

"Danger of what? Wolves? Oh no, not at this time of year," answered Austin. "They've plenty to eat, and that's what made me wonder why they were howling."

He paddled slowly on, and the howling died away, to be replaced by a singular wailing cry, like that of a child in sobs of extreme grief.

Louis became still more nervous.

"What's that, in Heaven's name?" he demanded.

"That's a panther, or what the guides call a painter," was the composed reply. "No danger out here; but our friend who lives over there must be a quiet fellow, or the beasts would be more shy. Here we are, near the shore. We'd better shout a little before we land. These hunters all keep dogs, and they're savage to strangers. Hallo-o-o-o!"

He raised his voice in a long cry that echoed among the mountains, and almost immediately out went the light!

Then they heard a scrambling and rushing in the bushes, and just at the same time the full moon shone down into the valley, as the last cloud vanished from before its face.

Louis Bonnelle uttered an exclamation of uncontrollable alarm, for the shore in front of them was covered with a crowd of wild beasts, who began to roar and howl in savage chorus, and at once dashed into the water and came swimming toward the canoe.

"Paddle for your life, Austin!" cried the young man, "or we shall be devoured."

CHAPTER II.

THE ANIMAL KING.

WITH a sweep of the paddle the artist sent the canoe whirling away into the deeper waters of the lake, his own nerves being considerably shaken by the sight before him, and not without reason.

There were three or four bears of all sizes, and a half-dozen wolves, all swimming, open-mouthed, after the canoe, uttering furious cries.

And then, as if to complete the weird and unnatural concourse of such creatures, three or four buck deer came leaping down the bank and dashed in among the other beasts, all swimming toward the canoe.

Louis Bonnelle and his companion were alike unarmed, having left their guns in camp with Davis, the guide, and this circumstance did not tend to make them any the less nervous, for the wild beasts all swam rapidly, and there was but one paddle in the canoe.

Austin plied this vigorously and sent the light craft skimming away, but the wild creatures still kept up the chase, and, as the lake was a small one, they soon had the intruders hemmed in between them and the opposite shore.

The artist saw the danger and turned his course to lead his pursuers in a circle, but they seemed to understand the maneuver, and kept heading him off until his arms were weary, when he panted:

"Here, Louis, take it. I'm played out," and sunk exhausted into the bottom of the boat.

In the short interval that elapsed before his less practiced companion could get the craft under control, the mob of wild beasts had come within twenty feet of their stern, and Louis, losing his coolness, made straight across for the further shore, and ran the canoe up high and dry amid a chorus of growls and roars, when he was about to jump up and run out in his bewilderment.

Albert Austin had grasped his hatchet in desperation, and the whole crowd of wild creatures was within a few yards of the bank, when a human figure suddenly dashed out of the bushes into full view on the beach, and a sharp, menacing voice cried out:

"Be quiet, brutes! Down, I say! Down!"

The effect was magical. The lately excited creatures ceased their cries and clustered together in the water as if undecided, when the stranger called out:

"Go home, brutes! Go home! Quick! Go home, I say!"

As he spoke he stamped his foot and threw some pebbles toward them.

Then, to the intense amazement of the young men, the whole mob of beasts turned tail and swam slowly away, while the stranger, turning to them, said, in the same sharp, menacing tone he had used to the animals:

"Get out of my canoe! Who gave you leave to take it? Think yourselves very lucky I called off my brutes. It would have served you right to have left you to be eaten up alive. Get out of that canoe, you sir. Do you hear me?"

The last remark was addressed to Austin, for Louis Bonnelle had already jumped out and was staring amazedly at the other.

Albert Austin, however, was not disposed to be ordered about like a child; so he slowly answered, as he got up:

"You needn't be so rude about it, my friend. We couldn't help getting lost in the woods, and when we found the canoe and saw the light over there, we thought we were near some sort of a Christian place. We don't want anything we can't pay for."

The stranger had listened to him with more patience than his previous dictatorial air had given them reason to expect, and now he came up closer to Austin and said in a more placable tone:

"If you're lost, that's a different matter. How did you get here? What road did you take?"

"I couldn't give you the least idea, not knowing myself. We were in camp at Pilot Knob Lake last night, and went off for a tramp without the guide. How we got here and where we are, I don't know."

"And you?" asked the stranger, turning sharply on Louis. "What are you doing here and why don't you say something?"

The young man was so surprised at the sudden onslaught that he stammered:

"I—I don't know. I came with my friend."

"Your friend!" echoed the stranger, in a tone of singularly bitter sarcasm. "So you, too, are one of the fools who have friends. You look like one. Bah!"

Louis was so much amazed at this singular response that he only stared. In truth this city bred youth, accustomed to the colorless uniformity of fashionable life, could not understand an eccentric or original character like the one before him.

Albert Austin, having knocked about the world, was interested in their new acquaintance and scanned him closely in the moonlight.

He appeared to be a man in the prime of life, hardy and healthy, though of short stature, with a lean, wiry figure. His face was thin, sunburnt and beardless, with keen blue eyes, while his light hair was worn long, falling from under a head covering of singular shape made of leather, tight as a skull-cap, and pushed back from his tall, narrow forehead.

His attire was all of leather, consisting of a tight jacket and leggings, devoid of skirts or capes of any kind. He looked as if he were exactly fitted by his dress to scramble through the most obstinate thorn thickets.

He carried no external weapons except a long straight spiked staff, and altogether was about the last figure to be expected in the State of New York in the nineteenth century.

His face though handsome wore an expression of habitual austere contempt, which was particularly plain as he turned his fierce blue eyes away from Louis and pursued to Austin:

"Well, young man, and what do you want, now you're here?"

Albert smiled as he answered:

"Simple enough. We want a place to sleep and something to eat."

The stranger curled his lip.

"There are fish in the lake, and the woods are all round you. Do as I do: find what you want?"

"But, having no firearms to shoot game we are likely to go hungry," retorted the artist, in a rallying tone. "Besides, why should we be forced to sleep out, when you have a house close at hand?"

"How do you know I've a house?" sharply asked the other.

"Because we saw the light almost as soon as we found your canoe."

The stranger bit his lips, frowned and turned away, muttering to himself something that sounded like an imprecation.

They noticed that his language and tones were those of an educated man, with no trace of the bad grammar and slang of the ordinary backwoods guide, and the mystery that surrounded his presence in the valley increased every moment.

Louis Bonnelle, who was beginning to recover his equanimity, here interposed:

"We're willing to pay well for our board, my friend. Possibly you don't know who I am, but—" Again the stranger disconcerted him by the suddenness with which he turned upon him, observing, sarcastically:

"No, I do not! and, what is more, I care not a jot for your position. Any one can see that you belong to the class of only sons who need a great deal of kicking to put them in good shape."

Then, leaving his victim once more in the discomfiture caused by his bitter sarcasm, he turned to Austin and said:

"It would serve you right to leave you out here to keep company with this idiot; but I'm in a merciful humor. If you will promise to obey my injunctions to the letter, I'll take you to my house and lodge you for the night. Will you give me your word that whatever you see or hear shall be kept sacredly secret from all mankind, forever after, and that you will ask no questions on the subject of me or any other person?"

Austin felt that he could not refuse the required pledge, so he said:

"I have intruded on you without meaning it, and I should be bound in honor not to tell any one else the secrets of your house. I give you my word."

"And as for this young gentleman," pursued the singular recluse, turning to Louis, in his usual abrupt way, "if he asks a single question, I'll call in all my brutes at once. Do you understand—ha?"

He seemed to take a malicious pleasure in shaking the nerves of the young man by his savage looks and words; but for once he had made a mistake.

Louis Bonnelle had begun to chafe under the superior airs of this little man, a good head shorter than himself, and he made answer, rather sternly:

"I understand that it's a small choice for rudeness between you and your brutes. Keep your house to yourself if you're so high and mighty over it."

The stranger burst into a loud laugh, and slapped the young man on the back with a vigor that showed him to be possessed of uncommon strength even if he was small in size.

"The boy has grit in him yet," he cried. "He shall come to the Palace of Brutes, and see how we live. He will not tattle and bring a crowd of impertinent strangers to hunt me out of the only place I have found where I can be alone. He shall come. Step in, gentlemen."

The unexpected display of spirit by the young man seemed to have pleased him so that he offered no further objections to their crossing; and, very soon after, the two friends found themselves once more afloat on the placid lake, and skimming forward under the impulse of the powerful strokes of this mysterious and eccentric recluse.

Once more they neared the further shore, where still were gathered the brutes that had lately terrified them so greatly, and, as the canoe glided forward, again they were met by bears, panthers, wolves and bucks, dashing into the water.

But the two strangers could now see, what was before unknown to them, that all this eagerness and noise was only to greet the master's approach, and Austin observed:

"We might have known there was no danger to us when panthers and deer are seen in the same herd, side by side. You have quite a happy family, sir."

The recluse smiled, and his generally thin, haggard face lighted up as he answered:

"Yes, they have never deceived me yet, though I suppose I shall find out they are as bad as men and women some day. At present they behave well."

As he spoke, he patted the head of a huge bear that swam alongside, putting up its muzzle, snorting and growling with eagerness to be caressed, and then hit a panther on the nose with his paddle, saying, sharply:

"Out of the way, Sulky! None of your tricks, or I'll have to discipline you."

The animal sneaked away sneezing, and soon after they landed, surrounded by the throng of animals, all seeming eager for notice from their master and heedless of the presence of strangers.

Albert Austin, who tried to pat one of them, was received with such a growl that he instinctively shrunk away, and their conductor observed, with a grim smile:

"Better leave my brutes alone, sir. They do not love strangers any better than myself."

As for Louis Bonnelle, he made no attempt at undue familiarity, but kept close to their leader, who walked up the beach into the thickets that lined the bank, and presently called out:

"Zip, Zip, where are you?"

He was answered by a singular sound, inarticulate and something like a low hum, and out into the moonlight came, bowing and grinning, a diminutive dwarfish creature, more like a monkey than a man, apparently covered with long hair from head to foot, but having a distinctly human face, mild and gentle, but decidedly silly.

This creature bowed before the master of the place with extravagant gesticulations, and the recluse said to him in a tone of command:

"Stop your grinning, Zip. You have been disobeying my orders."

The dwarf made emphatic gestures of denial, with the same inarticulate humming noise; but his master shook his finger at him and said sternly:

"You lighted the lamp, and the light drew two strangers. Try it again and I'll tell Sulky to tear you to pieces."

The poor creature fell on his knees, as if overcome with terror; and Sulky, the largest panther, hearing his name, gave vent to a savage growl which would have made most men tremble.

Then the singular recluse, turning to his guests, observed:

"Zip's a good boy, but troublesome. He often thinks he knows something, when truly he is but a

fool. However, you may thank him for supper and bed to-night. Had he not lighted the lamp, you might have slept in the forest. Come, let us go into the house. You will find it comfortable enough, once you are in."

Albert Austin looked round him in bewilderment. "House!" he echoed. "I see no house."

"I never intended you should," was the reply; "nevertheless we are now at the door. Come in."

As he spoke he parted some bushes with his hands and disclosed a brown bank of earth.

Stooping toward it, he grasped some unseen handle and threw open a trap-door leading to the heart of the mountain before them.

CHAPTER III.

THE HERMIT'S HOME.

THEY were at the foot of a mountain-side that rose steeply up, and the hermit's dwelling seemed to be cut out of its heart, for they went into a long and dark passage that led straight forward forty or fifty feet, till it opened into a large and spacious cavern.

So much they could see or feel even in the darkness, but presently their singular host struck fire with a flint and steel and lighted a number of large candles made of the coarse yellow wax of the wild bees, and supported on the horns of a deer's head set up on a wall of the cavern so that they could see clearly the whole abode.

It was not very large, but it was evidently of natural formation, for the limestone of the walls showed by its ridges the action of water in past times, and they could hear the distant dripping of the same element down a narrow rift in the rocks at one corner.

The furniture of the chamber was a singular and interesting example of woodland makeshift. There were rough tables and chairs of unpainted wood, deer's heads and skins of wild animals, but everything finished with a certain degree of ingenuity, as if by a skillful mechanic.

A number of carpenter's and cabinet-maker's tools, on a rough bench, revealed the workman to be their host, while a collection of curious weapons of all kinds displayed against a screen of birch-bark, showed that he had been a traveler.

Austin turned to Louis, and found him staring round the cavern with the amazed look of a young man who had never seen anything of the world outside of New York city, while their host was moving about with the air of one at home amid his treasures.

Presently Zip, the dumb dwarf, came in with an armful of wood, and proceeded to light a fire in the corner of the excavation, where they saw a sort of fireplace.

He showed them by signs where to hang up their belongings, pointed to chairs by the table, and finally went behind a skin curtain in the corner of the cabin, from whence he returned with a huge wooden platter, on which was a noble haunch of cold venison, which he set before them with two hunting-knives.

"I am sorry," said the hermit, in his sharp, metallic tones, but quite courteously, "that I cannot give you gentlemen any of the luxuries to which you are accustomed in the way of drinks, but I have touched nothing except water for many years. Of that there is abundance, after you have eaten. I never drink during a meal. Fall to, gentlemen."

He set them the example himself, and they attacked the venison with the zest of hungry men, till Louis asked:

"Excuse me, but don't you use salt?"

"Sir," answered the recluse, looking him full in the face in his odd and abrupt way, "I follow the rules God gave other carnivorous animals. Eat and be thankful."

Louis bit his lip and looked vexed, but their host continued his meal calmly, and presently observed:

"We have been together an hour and I do not know your names, as I never ask questions."

The hint was so broad that Albert could not help smiling, while Louis, with a blush of real embarrassment at his own imputed rudeness, hastily gave the information and added:

"We've been friends a long time, though I understand you don't believe in the fact of friendship; but Albert here has stuck to me when I was hard hit, you see, and I can't help calling him my friend."

Their odd host cast a swift glance at the young man, and replied, in a caustic tone:

"I used to believe in friendship myself once. You have been in love, and you're whining over it, I see. Never mind. It is computed that there are about five hundred million women in the world. Why should you fret about one? Let her go down the wind."

He spoke in that cynical way which imposes on a fresh boy like Louis, and the latter impulsively said:

"Ah, sir, it's easy to talk, but if you only knew her."

The recluse looked at the boy, who had turned away his head, his lip trembling, and said in the same contemptuous manner:

"I was just the same once. But there are plenty more. Some spoiled beauty, I suppose, who thinks you too poor."

"Oh no," was the eager reply; "for that matter, I am as good a match, they say, as any in the city; but my father would not hear of it, and she would not run away with me without his consent."

The recluse curled his lip.

"Indeed? She must be a paragon of virtue, this damsel, or else a marvel of artfulness."

Albert Austin, listening to the conversation, saw that young Bonnelle was growing angry as he always did when any one questioned the absolute perfections of his lady.

"I tell you, sir," he cried, angrily, "that Nina Morelli is an angel of—"

He stopped, amazed, for his host had leaped to his feet as if he were made of steel springs, and had clutched him by both shoulders with a gripe like a vise, while he shrieked out in his high tenor tones, quivering with apparent fury:

"Morelli! Morelli! Curse you, boy, do you know Morelli? How dare you speak that name to me?"

His countenance seemed to blaze with such extremity of rage that Albert, who began to fear their host was quite mad, jumped up and seized him from behind, crying out:

"What's the matter with you! Are you crazy?"

In a moment the wiry recluse had turned and grappled with him like one of his own bears, with a dexterity no bear ever showed, and before Austin, who was a stout, tall young fellow, knew what had happened to him, he was lying on his back, and the stranger was looking down at him in a bewildered sort of way.

Then the stranger passed his hand across his brow and said, in a manner like that of one waking from a dream:

"I beg your pardon. I hope I've not hurt you. One of you spoke the name of a person—did not some one say Morelli?"

It was a singular thing that Austin, as he rose from his sudden fall, felt no animosity toward the stranger. He began, indeed, to regard him as a sort of being not to be held responsible like other men, if not actually a maniac.

So he answered:

"My friend said Nina Morelli. She is the child of a traveling showman and dances on a wire, but I am sure that she is an excellent girl for all that, thoroughly good and virtuous."

"Why do you think so?" asked the recluse, who had been listening with a silent, staring intentness that was very remarkable.

"Because she refused Louis here, who could have offered her a princely establishment, simply for the reason that his father refused to permit a marriage."

"But her father," asked the recluse, in a grating voice; "he was not so scrupulous. He would have sold his child—is it not so?"

Austin flushed slightly as he answered:

"I half think he would. But I tell you there was no occasion. The girl is a jewel of the first water. I know it, though I never had the honor of seeing her."

Their eccentric host drew in a deep sigh and seemed to muse a little. At last he said—and a singular smile played over his features as he spoke:

"And Morelli has a marriageable daughter, who is a jewel? Ah! Yes! And you think he loves her? Of course, of course—was there ever a father failed to love a child? Even my brutes would die for their cubs."

He spoke in an absent sort of way, as if he had forgotten where he was; and presently added, half under his breath:

"Yes, even a bear will fight for her whelps, and revenge their loss."

Then he turned to Louis Bonnelle and bowed.

"I ask your pardon, sir," he said, in the softest of tones, "for the rudeness of which I was guilty in my excitement toward you. I am twice your age, but I warn you of this. Better leap into the current of Niagara river above the falls than marry any child of Antonio Morelli! There is a curse on him. Now you are tired. I will show you your room. It is one of my rules to go to bed early."

Without another word, he took them to one side of the cave, behind a heavy curtain of deer-skin, and showed them two beds made up of furs, and lying on heaps of fragrant hemlock twigs.

Ushering them in, he briefly said:

"Good-night. Call Zip if you want anything. He understands, though he is dumb."

With a slight bow he left them, and the wearied travelers were soon fast asleep, to dream of their day's adventures.

How long they had slept neither of them knew, for they were very weary; but when they awoke it was to find the sun shining into their eyes, while they lay on their couch of skins in the open air, on the side of a valley in which they had never before been to their knowledge.

Louis Bonnelle was the first to awaken, start up, and rub his eyes, crying:

"By Jove, Austin, how came we here? This must be witchcraft."

Then, as they both roused up and looked around, they discovered that the beds on which they had been lying were made up on stretchers, side by side, with handles at head and foot, and so judged that they must have been carried out of the cavern in their sleep.

"But where? For we are surely not in the valley in which we were last night," remarked Austin, thoughtfully.

Indeed it was true. Before them was no lake, and they lay at the mouth of a wide gap in the mountains, which looked down into a settled country, from which curled numerous wreaths of smoke.

But behind them was no trace, even the slightest, of any entrance or cavern in the mountain, and but for the tangible evidence of the skin couch on which they lay, they could have fancied all that had passed a dream.

Then Austin uttered an exclamation of satisfaction, as his eye caught something on his bed:

"Ah! a letter, by Jove; that will explain."

He opened it and found only these words:

"Forget you ever saw me if you meet me again. I have left the mountains forever. I am glad I saw you both."

There was no signature.

"If ever we meet again!" echoed Albert. "Well,

if ever I meet you I'll be sure *not* to forget you, old fellow, for of all the queer people I ever met, you're the very queerest. What in the world's taken him off now, I wonder?"

Louis Bonnelle, usually the more obtuse of the two, surprised him by answering:

"To find Morelli. Couldn't you see that he hated him? He's gone in chase, and if I'm not mistaken, the chase will lead him to the world's end."

"Why? Where's Morelli now?" asked Austin.

"Gone to the African diamond fields," replied his friend.

CHAPTER IV.

IN THE DIAMOND FIELDS.

A WASTE of white dust-heaps; a labyrinth of dark pits, burrowing into the bowels of the earth; a forest of scaffolding; a great city of tents, gay with the flags of every nation known, and many never heard of elsewhere; crowds of dirty white men begrimed with dust, in their gray clothes; swarms of naked Basutos, Hottentots and Pondo Kaffres, working in the pits under the eyes of their white masters; carts and wagons drawn by bullocks and mules; horse-men galloping about through the tent streets, yelling in drunken excitement; great marquees, that dispensed bad beer and worse gin and brandy at half a dollar a gill, and yet were always jammed with customers; a little squad of blue-coated mounted police, patrolling the canvas metropolis to keep a semblance of order; such was the settlement of Colesberg Koppy, in the heart of the diamond fever.

And here, into the midst of this brawling sea of humanity, slowly "trekking" over the arid plains around it, under the burning sun of an African summer in the month of February, came a train of Cape wagons, drawn by long strings of lean oxen with immense horns, all the vehicles bearing on their canvas tilts the words:

"MORELLI'S GREAT MORAL SHOW."

In front of the caravan, mounted on a piebald horse and dressed in a suit of spangles, with plumes in his cotton velvet cap, was a man of very dark complexion, with piercing black eyes and glossy beard of raven hue.

He had three large wagons, from the front of which looked forth the faces of several women and children, while, trudging along by the wagons, outside of the Caffre drivers were several men of the unmistakable slouchy "show" variety, with ill-fitting clothes and careless gait, assumed on purpose to disguise their real trimness and symmetry of frame.

As the leading horseman paused on the brow of a little hillock to survey the scene, he noticed another caravan coming toward the same place by another road, preceded by two men on horseback, and they were so close to each other that they met within a short distance of the camp, and saluted in Cape Colony fashion with the Dutch words, "*Guten dag*" (Good-day) and a scrutinizing glance at each other.

Then the man with the show uttered a cry of astonishment and joyful recognition:

"Ah *Dio!* Signor Bonelli, vas dat you, and how vas you come 'ere?"

The young man he addressed was none other than Louis Bonnelle, in sporting dress, accompanied by his friend, Albert Austin; and both returned his greeting with cordiality, for acquaintances, however slight, become friends when they are met in a far country.

Then Austin said in a bantering tone:

"What are you doing here, old fellow? Don't you know this camp will break up inside of a week?"

The showman's countenance fell visibly, as he asked:

"In a week! Vat you mean, signor? I've spent—oh! so much monnee to get 'ere. De oxen dey die wiz ze fly and de seekness, and I buy, buy, till, *Corpo di Bacco!* it is nozing but buy all de time. And now you say ze camp break up next week. Vat you mean?"

"Well, Morelli, I must say that for a man of your sharpness you must have been asleep for the last few weeks. Which way did you come?"

"From Cape Town, signor, playing at all de places. I've been t'ree mont' on de road. Eh, *Dio!* such poor beezeness!"

And the Italian lifted his hands and eyes to heaven as if to call it to witness he spoke truth.

"Then you've heard nothing of the trouble in the Natal and the Zulu country?" asked Austin.

"Nosing, signor; vat eez it?"

"Why, they've begun fighting there, and the English army has been whipped all to pieces by the Zulus, and they've sent for reinforcements, and I've come on as a special artist. Didn't you know it?"

"No, no, I tell you no," cried the showman, in a tone of desperation. "And you say de fighting veel come 'ere? Eh, *Dio*, vat s'all I do viz my show? I s'all be ruine."

"Not a bit of it," interrupted Louis Bonnelle, who had been very silent during the colloquy, and eagerly scanning the line of wagons. "These diamond-hunters will hold on to their diggings to the last, till the troops warn them off, and you can reap a good harvest while you're here. If I were you, I'd set up at once, get what you can, and then move down to Port Natal with the miners, getting money on the road. There will be soldiers and sailors enough to pay you well."

Morelli looked more cheerful at the prospect, and as the caravan entered the camp he was comforted still more at observing the crowds of men who came running out of the diggings to follow his wagons and shout.

"Say, mister, when do you open the show? Set it up right away! Hurray for the first show! Hurray!"

There were several thousand rough men on the grounds, and the curiosity to see the new show was so great that there was no difficulty in securing a site for the tent, and hundreds of willing hands were ready to help set it up.

But Louis Bonnelle, who had come half round the world with his friend, Austin, ostensibly to travel and see the world, could nowhere find the object of his constant thoughts.

Look where he would round the show, he could see nothing of her who was to him all it contained of beauty.

He had kept secret from his father the fact that Morelli's party had gone to South Africa, and Mr. Bonnelle, senior, had been only too willing to see his son go off on a long trip to occupy his mind, the more so that Austin guarded his friend's secret carefully.

And now here they were in the very vicinity of the object of his search, and yet Nina was nowhere to be seen, and Louis did not dare to ask for her.

Madame Morelli, stout and swarthy, with her tribe of small Morellis, was in a dozen places at once, scolding, ordering, giving directions; but no Nina was visible.

The wagons were "laagered" in Cape style—what we call corralled—and a canvas fence drawn round them, with the tent and ticket office in front, and then out came the flaming posters of the "Great Moral Show" to raise the excitement to fever heat.

And when at last the window of the office opened, and Madame Morelli took her seat at the door to receive tickets, there was a rush of spectators, nothing daunted by the price of admission, which was one sovereign, till the big tent was crammed to suffocation inside.

And once in, the miners were not the sort of people to wait for their entertainment: for they began to shout and stamp on the ground, fire pistols through the roof of the tent, and indulge in various other little playful hints that it was time the curtain went up.

Our two friends had been among the first to enter and obtain front standing-places—for seats there were none—and very soon the well-remembered dingy green baize went up and revealed Signor Morelli, the "Magician of Milan," in his "famous and world-renowned feats of conjuring."

Only a few old-fashioned mechanical tricks; but how the audience applauded them! and when Signor Morelli retired, in his high cap and gown, there was a great howl of applause, while a group of wild Caffres in the rear of the tent began to sing their witch doctor's song and dance in time, till the white men fired a volley of pistol-shots over their heads to quiet them, reckless of who was hit.

Then came "Master Giovanni Morelli, the Infant Phenomenon," in a song and dance in sailor dress, which took equally well—indeed, better—for a burly miner rose up in his seat, and, bellowing: "Here, kid, ketch this," threw a small diamond to the boy, who sailed out happy.

Then came a tumbling act by the two "Morelli India-rubber Twins," who twisted themselves into all sorts of queer positions, to be rather coldly received by the audience.

And then on a sudden came a perfect hush on stage and people together, as a young girl, dressed in pure white, with blue eyes, the face of an angel and hair of the very palest flaxen, advanced to the center of the stage, bowed with easy grace, and began to sing the familiar ballad of "Annie Laurie" to the accompaniment of a single violin behind the scenes.

It was marvelous to note the perfect contrast between this girl, in her virgin purity and innocence, and all the coarse surroundings amid which she was placed, as well as the hush that followed her entrance.

The rough, swearing miners; the wild Pondos and Basutos in the rear, given over to gluttony and bad gin; the most hardened ruffians of a hard camp—all were quelled in a moment and stood staring open-mouthed at the artless simplicity of this little girl, singing a threadbare ballad with a gentle voice whose only merit was its sweetness.

Louis Bonnelle, who had half risen on her entrance, gripped his friend's arm hard and looked round on the congregation of ruffians as if to seek for some coarse look and resent it, but saw nothing save serious, wondering faces, full of admiration and respectful awe.

One might have heard a pin drop in the tent as the girl continued her song, without any one venturing to applaud; but as she neared the last lines Albert Austin could not help smiling to see the way in which the miners, with serious, anxious countenances began to rummage in their pockets.

As she bowed deeply to retire, a yell of applause arose that beggared all the former enthusiasm, and a perfect shower of gold sovereigns, handfuls of silver, diamonds of all sizes and degrees of purity, and gold chains, taken in haste from watches, went flying on the stage and fell all round the girl, a few touching her dress.

She seemed frightened at the clamor and shrunk back instinctively, putting up her hands as if to defend herself; but in a minute more Signor Morelli came swiftly from the side scenes, fiddle in hand, and began to pick up the objects and pour them into her lap in true show fashion, smiling and bowing.

He said something to her, however, when his back was turned to the people, not so polite as his demeanor.

"You stupid fool, sing again! We shall make our fortunes here. What makes you hesitate? I tell you the young American idiot is here. You can hook him yet if you play your cards well."

"And that is why I cannot sing so well," she answered, in a low tone. "I am oppressed, stifled with fear, my father."

"Go on and sing without more airs," he said, in a growl; and then he turned smirking to the shouting audience and waved his fiddle toward Nina, as if to indicate that she was about to sing again.

Then how quickly they hushed! and yet there was a subdued murmur as the girl came forward again; for the violin was playing the prelude to the "Last Rose of Summer."

"Those old ballads are the best, after all, to move the heart," musingly observed Albert Austin, half-aloud; and Louis Bonnelle pressed his hand and whispered:

"Yes, when *she* sings them. What do you think of her, Albert?"

Albert nodded his head and yawned.

"Very pretty and sweet. Too colorless for my taste, perhaps."

His comrade flushed deeply and was about to make a passionate defense of the lady, when she began to sing again, and from that moment he was lost to all but Nina Morelli.

Her second song called forth even more rapture than the first, and men began to turn their pockets inside out to find something more to throw to the singer.

They would not let her go away till she had sung a third time, and it required the broad hint conveyed in "Home, Sweet Home," before they permitted her to depart, with a good thousand pounds' worth of gold, silver and diamonds swept up on one of Signor Morelli's salvers, over which the fair songstress bowed low.

"Now I'm going behind. I can't stand it any more—I *must* see her," declared the young millionaire to Albert Austin, as a juggler boy with his knives and gold balls came on, to be received with chilling silence.

"Why *must* you go?"

"Because something's the matter with Nina."

"How do you know?"

"Didn't you notice her white face and the slow, languid way she walked?"

"Not particularly. But I thought she was in the habit of taking her usual walk on a wire over the heads of the people, Master Louis. I prepared myself for a young woman in tights, and, lo! here is a modest little creature, who sings sentimental melodies and looks like a love-sick school-girl."

Louis colored furiously and answered in a low tone:

"She used to walk the wire once and be fired out of a cannon too; but I see she does not do it now. That's what I'm going in to see about."

"But they won't let you in."

"Yes, they will, for they all know me."

And Louis Bonnelle made his way out through the crowd, followed by his friend, and went round the canvas inclosure to the rear of the show, where they were confronted by a tall Caffre with a big club, who said in broken English:

"You keepy back, ally samee. Kah! kah! kah! no whitey man here."

"I'm a friend of Mr. Morelli," insisted the young man, and then they heard the voice of the showman, saying:

"All right, Tommy! Let them in."

CHAPTER V.

THE MAN ON THE ZEBRA.

NATURALLY Albert Austin followed his friend, for he was decidedly anxious to see more of the girl who had sung so sweetly.

He had only judged of her from report before, and had been so much bored by his friend's raptures that he was positively prepared to dislike Nina when he saw her.

He had heard of her as a marvel of grace and agility, full of high spirits and fun, and he found a pale, sweet little creature, who sung simple ballads with a voice like the note of a bird that pined for the woods.

He had pretended to be disappointed in her as "too colorless for his taste;" but this was far from being really the case. As a matter of fact, Albert Austin, man of the world, artist, journalist, cynical looker-on at the beauty of half the globe, felt strongly inclined at that moment to make desperate love to Nina on his own account if he could get the chance.

Presently they were under the canvas roof of the little stage, behind the scenes that had been so hastily put up, and here Morelli, with a profusion of bows and grimaces, introduced his guests to his wife—who had come round to the rear after the show opened—and a large family of swarthy boys, from little Giovanni, the tar, to the India-rubber Twins, while Louis was looking round with ill-disguised impatience for the fair songstress.

Austin, who was more self-possessed and not so self-conscious, finally asked Morelli plumply:

"And where is your daughter that sings, signor? Is she not here?"

Morelli shrugged his shoulders in a way completely Italian, as he replied deprecatingly:

"Ah, signor, de shild is not well to-day. She is tire from de voyage, and I send 'er to ze vagon to sleep. Anozer time."

And Louis Bonnelle was obliged to be content with what crumbs of comfort he could obtain from hearing there was to be a second show in the evening, as he backed out of the penetralia of the theater.

"Well, Austin, what do you think of it?" he asked, anxiously, as they came away.

"I think that Italian fellow is going to play you for all you are worth," was the reply, in Albert's most cynical manner; "and I also see one thing, that you can *never* marry this girl."

"Why not, why not?" asked Louis, angrily. "Isn't she as pure as an angel?"

"Exactly—don't, my dear fellow—I know all the rest," interrupted his friend, with a drawl of un-

usual affectation. "But be she what she may, you couldn't get rid of this horrible family that's with her. They'd be nice people to introduce in your father's drawing-room, wouldn't they?"

Louis couldn't deny the insinuation, and his mentor mercilessly pursued:

"It's just as well you didn't see her. They want to make you more eager after her, and get you married; that's what they want; but I'm glad you have a good excuse to go away. Come, Louis, be a man. I'm going on to the front to-morrow. You come with me, and leave this girl to her own people."

"How do you know they are her own people? I don't believe Morelli can be her father. He doesn't look, act or talk like her."

Louis felt stubborn; but Albert only smiled as he retorted:

"You can't prove her anything else but his daughter. Who'd believe you? You can't take up her case without marrying her; and if you do that, the whole Morelli tribe will hang on to you like leeches. You can't get rid of them."

Louis looked grave.

"There's no fear of that. I can't marry her till I get my father's consent. I gave my word to him before I left home."

"And you'll keep it, of course," said Austin, cheerfully. "Very well, then; what's the use of staying here? We're on our way to the front; let's go on to-morrow morning."

"I believe I'd better," said poor Louis, in a gloomy voice, his eyes on the ground.

"Of course you'd better. Now let's see if the boys have got our tent put in a decent place, out of the dust."

They found their wagon, without which no one ever travels in Cape Colony, halted at a little distance from the camp, and on the banks of the stream, above where it was defiled by the diamond diggings; and here their Hottentot cook was ready with dinner, to which quite a little crowd of miners invited themselves, or came in to smoke and chat.

The friends found them all intelligent men, with many among them of good education and former wealth, and very soon the conversation drifted to the Zulu war and the danger that the army of Ketchywayo might burst in on the miners at any moment.

"We used to find the Zulus—what few would come out this way from Natal—the best workers we had," said one old miner, "but they've all gone away since they heard there was fighting. I've been here since '72, and I must say I never saw a nigger war here where our side wasn't wrong in the beginning. I ain't glad the Twenty-fourth's fellows got killed, of course, but it served 'em right, after all."

"Do you suppose there'll be any danger in our going through to Lord Chelmsford's head-quarters?" asked Austin.

"Danger? Well, nothing unless you meet a Zulu impi out on a raid. In that case you'll lose your wagon certain, and your life, too, unless you have a good horse."

"We're well provided in that line. An impi, I suppose, is a war-party."

"Jest so, and a Zulu impi'll put you more in mind of the devil and his imps than anything you ever saw. I remember it once, and I never want to see one coming after me again."

And the old miner sucked reflectively at his pipe and remarked presently:

"Bout time to go to that evening show at Morelli's. I'm told it's good, and that half the camp went wild over a little gal. How's that, boys? I warn't in there."

The miners eagerly assented, and, as the sun was getting low, began to rise and take their homely leave.

Louis Bonnelle, who was getting bored, and who was also much disappointed at the memory of his promise to his friend to go away in the morning, had turned away his head and was looking down the river toward the west, when his attention was attracted by the singular sight of a pair of zebras, both having riders and followed by a regular herd of the striated animals, coming toward the camp at a speed that would have distanced any but a first-class thoroughbred.

The miners also saw the strange sight, and one of them cried out, laughing:

"Eavens, Bill, 'ere's another magician a-comin'! We'll 'ave a crowd of shows in this camp of ourn before they've done. Bring on yer oppery troop, mates! Lots of swag round these claims, all ready to jump and hold onto."

They naturally thought that no one but a showman would travel the country in such a singular guise and mounted on such outlandish animals, generally reputed to be untamable.

But the two strange riders did not enter the camp or slacken their speed. They swept on at the same swift steady pace, circled round the whole camp as if taking an observation of everything, and finally passed close to Morelli's show, drawing hundreds of miners from their tents to see the novel sight.

They did not come near enough for any to recognize the figures of the riders, though they seemed to be black men; but as the cavalcade passed Morelli's there was a sudden commotion, followed by the flashing of pistols, and the little herd of zebras came back by Albert Austin's tent at the full speed of which they were capable.

Then Austin brought out his field-glass and saw that the foremost rider, while very much sunburnt, was yet a white man, dressed in a curious close-fitting suit of the same color as his face, while his long, tawny hair floated behind him on the breeze, and he carried in his hand a bundle of native spears.

The other rider was very small in size, and a naked negro or Kaffre, to all seeming, but he also carried a bundle of javelins.

Neither had any saddle or bridle, but both appeared to guide their animals by a touch of the heel or hand.

Something seemed to him familiar in their aspect, but he could not tell what it was; and presently they were close by the tent, passed it like a whirlwind, and were off into the dusty plain like vanishing dreams.

When they were about a quarter of a mile off, the young artist, watching through the glass, saw both the white man and the black change their mounts in full career, and gallop on faster than ever.

In a few minutes more they had gone out of sight behind a grove of mimosa, and were not seen again.

Then the miners began to talk all together of what had happened, and to wonder what the shooting was about down by Morelli's show. Albert Austin was curious enough to call for his horse, and to ride down and see.

He found a dense crowd collected at the stage entrance of the show, while words of pity and condolence were plentiful. Coming into the crowd he saw Morelli himself, his hands clutching his hair, kneeling over a wounded boy, whom he recognized at once as Giuseppe Morelli, one of the acrobats of the family.

The manner of his injury was shown by the presence of a native assegai which had transfixed his shoulder.

"In Heaven's name, how did this happen?" the artist asked anxiously of Morelli, who looked up, recognized him and burst out sobbing.

"Oh, signor, my Giuseppe!—*mi bambino!* 'E vill not be able to play to-night. Ze Zulu 'ave nearlee keeled eem and I am ruine—ruine—oh, *mi bambino!* my shild!"

Austin turned to one of the miners and asked in a low tone how it came to pass, and the man told him:

"We was lookin' out at the queer coves on the striped donkeys, sir, and speck'latin' on what kind of a show they was goin' to give, when they comed this way, and the guvener 'ere—this Morelli—he cum out, too, to take a squint, I s'pose, along with the hull family; when, jest as that queer cove comes by, 'e 'ollers out in some outlandish lingo—'twarn't Kaffre or Zulu, 'cause I've 'eerd them too often—and old Morelli 'e turns pale as a ghost, and 'ollers back something about misery, and a'cordian, sir, though what it meant blest if I know, and next minute the long-aided cove he ups with an assegai and sends it at Morelli, who throws himself flat on the ground so it misses him. Then the other cove—the black one—he laughs and sends another, and jest at that moment the boy 'ere 'e runs in front of his dad like a little piece of real British pluck, and gets the assegai plum through his pore little shoulder. That's all. We got so savage we fired at the scoundrel; but it warn't no use, and he got away; though who he is I don't know any more than the babe unborn."

Then Albert Austin turned to Morelli, who was still rocking to and fro and wailing over the wounded boy, and asked:

"Have you not a deadly enemy, who owes you a bitter spite for the past, signor?"

The Italian looked up with a pallid face, trembling in every limb, and eagerly said:

"No, no, signor, *per Dio*, no! I 'ave no enemy. It was Zulu, Zulu do eem. Oh, vy did I coom to zis countree? I go 'ome to-morrow."

"And you're sure you have no enemy?" the artist went on, in the same searching tone.

The showman this time arose and began to curse and swear in a mixture of English and Italian that was evidence of his desperation, as he called on God to witness that the Zulus had ruined his child, and that he would leave the country by the next steamer from Natal.

"Then you won't 'ave no show to-night?" suggested one of the men, listening.

Instantly the Italian's face changed, and he shook his hands in the old deprecating way as he screamed:

"Vy you no leaf me alone? I vill gif you a show at vonce. Yes, but Giuseppe cannot do his act any more. I must ask you to excuse a me for dat. Yes, yes, you shall 'ave your show, but I sharges two sovereign admittance, in consideration of de grief in my familie. Nina vill sing again, and ve vill go afay from here in ze morning."

And he was as good as his word.

CHAPTER VI.

THE IMPI.

ONLY a few days after this, two young men on horseback, armed with rifles and revolvers of the latest patterns, and well mounted, were approaching the banks of the Tugela, where the English forces had clustered in laagers and forts to resist the expected onslaught of the terrible Zulus. They had heard of them often, but had never yet seen a Zulu; and Austin, in particular, was burning to take a Zulu portrait.

They had joined head-quarters, and were now on a scouting expedition of their own, undertaken with American independence and dash, "to find out something about the Zulus" in their native wilds.

As they rode along they were talking about the scene they had witnessed at Colesberg Koppy.

Said Austin, thoughtfully:

"It's all very well for Morelli to say he has no enemy; but he has one whom he fears so much he dare not let people know it. You heard what that miner said—that he called to the stranger something about 'misery and an accordion?' Do you know what he meant?"

"No, I've been cudgeling my brains ever since to find out."

"It must have been the Italian word 'misericordia!'—'mercy!'—and if he said that, he must have

thought the other understood him. That man on the zebra knows Morelli, and Morelli knows him."

"But, who can he be?" asked Louis, in a thoughtful tone.

"Some old enemy whom Morelli has injured cruelly in the past, though how he comes here is the mystery. I have an idea we've seen him, though."

"Seen whom?"

"The man on the zebra."

Louis started.

"Where? I don't remember—"

"Don't you remember our little adventure on the Adirondacks nearly a year ago, when we got lost and were found by that queer fellow with the wild beasts?"

"I should say so! One couldn't forget it very easily. I wonder we could never find that valley again."

"Our friend didn't intend we should, in a hurry. It's my opinion the cavern we were in went clear through the mountain, and that he and that dumb dwarf carried us out on the other side. But, that's nothing to do with this question. You remember that man had a wonderful mastery over wild animals?"

"I should say I did. Ugh! I'll never forget those horrible beasts chasing us."

"And you remember also what a fury the name of Morelli put him into?"

"I do well. I thought he'd throttle me."

"Well, Louis, I'm pretty well convinced that our mysterious friend, the mad hermit of the Adirondacks, is the very man now persecuting this Morelli."

Louis seemed troubled in his mind.

"I hope he won't include Nina in his persecution," he said, with concern. "I frankly admit I'm afraid of him, for he's a perfect devil, but—"

"Whiz!!"

He started back in his saddle with a cry of instinctive alarm as an assegai flew past his face, though to all appearance the country was solitary around them, and the next moment Austin turned his horse, shouting:

"Run! run! the Zulus!"

They were in a beautiful rolling country interspersed with clumps of trees and coppice wood, the long dry grass standing as high as their horses' bellies; and out of the cover had suddenly started a long line of dark warriors, plumed and decorated, who were bounding to meet them, uttering deep hoarse shouts.

In a moment more the young men, their hearts beating tumultuously, had wheeled their frightened chargers, and were galloping away for dear life, lying down on their horses' necks to escape the shower of assegais.

Luckily for them the over eagerness of the Zulu who had thrown the first spear had caused him to miss his mark; but, though they were out of range of that party in a few bounds they were far from being out of danger.

Louis Bonnelle was the first to see this fact, as he called out in horrified tones:

"Look, look, Austin! We are lost!"

Austin cast a glance to right and left, and saw that they were in the midst of a huge crescent or horse-shoe line of Zulu warriors, who were running in from the flanks to head them off with every prospect of so doing.

They bounded along like deer, striking their long shields with their spears and singing all the time the deep notes of the terrible war-song of Chaka, the Zulu Napoleon.

The friends did not understand a word of it, but they knew it was something bloody, and the very peculiarity of the deep notes, so different from the usual shrill yells of savages, gave the sweep of the impi an appalling aspect that would have terrified the boldest.

They could even distinguish the words, though they understood them not, so perfect was the concordant rhythm of the hundreds of voices.

"Wa keda, keda izizway!"

Ushlasela pina.

Eh! eh! eh! eh!

Ushlasela pina."

On they went as hard as they could tear; but the dusky warriors were too quick for them, and already the horns of the huge crescent had closed in front of them, when Albert Austin cried out to his friend:

"Sell your life dearly, Louis. Give it to 'em!"

Then he turned his horse and raced back to the pursuing warriors, firing his Winchester carbine over his horse's head as he went, till every shot was gone.

Only a few seconds sufficed for this, and he was close on the Zulus, when Louis dashed by him, his horse having run away in sheer fright, and the next minute they were into the midst of the savage warriors, firing revolvers right and left, while the assegais flew by them in showers, only missing them, as it seemed, by a constant miracle, due really to the rapidity of their motion and the excitement of the Zulus.

A tall warrior, with the figure of a bronze Apollo and the face of a demon, made a bound at Austin's bridle, missed it, and was hurled twenty feet by the rush of the frightened horse, and then the friends had burst through and were dreaming of safety, when the thud of a spear told that some one was hit at last, and Louis Bonnelle uttered a cry of angry pain as his left arm was transfixed by the flying weapon.

Another assegai grazed Austin's cheek, cutting a

* The war song of Chaka, which translated, means:

"Thou hast slaughtered, slaughtered nations

Where wilt send us to battle?

Yes! yes! yes! yes!

Where wilt send to battle?"

gash as it went, and their horses were covered with grazes of the sharp blades, when they heard a great shout of triumph and the rapid clatter of hoofs behind them.

Then, as they instinctively turned to look behind, there was the mob of zebras they had seen at Colesberg with the two wild riders, coming up with them at every stride, from the extreme flank of the Zulus.

Now indeed they felt there was danger, for these men could pursue them, and Louis Bonnelle, grinding his teeth to hide his agony, called out to Austin:

"Pull out this cursed spear, so we can fight fair. I can kill that villain yet."

Even as he spoke, the shaking of the horse caused the weapon to drop out, and the blood came in a stream, and the young man faltered and fell exhausted and senseless from his horse.

With the blind instinct of friendship Albert Austin wheeled his horse and leaped off, hurriedly cramming fresh cartridges into his Winchester rifle.

If he must die, he would sell his life dearly and die by his friend.

On came the *impi*, with the rising and falling chorus of the war-song, and on came the zebras and their weird riders. They were within fifty feet when Austin caught up his rifle and pulled the trigger; and then—

"Click!"

The cartridge had failed!

With a bitter curse of fury the young man reversed the lever, but again he was thwarted.

The cartridge stuck fast!

Then, beside himself with desperation, he hurled his empty pistols at the Zulus, felling two warriors, clubbed the useless rifle, and dashed into the fray, when in a moment he was surrounded and knocked senseless from a blow on the head, given by the knob-stick in the hands of one of his foemen.

As he went down a young Zulu, with his stabbing spear, was rushing at him, and he heard some one shout:

"Yoba! Yoba!"

Then the landscape reeled before his eyes and he dropped as senseless as Louis, who had fainted from loss of blood.

How long he lay there he knew not, but at last he awoke with a dull pain in his head and a sense of blinding glare in his face, to find himself lying on his back in the grass, staring up at the sky.

For a moment he could remember nothing, and then the whole scene came back to him, and he feebly turned his head, for all his strength seemed to have gone out of him.

He lay by the side of his friend Louis, and over the wounded boy knelt a brown, dwarfish savage, with feathers in his hair, who was binding up the wounded arm with a piece of scarlet cloth, evidently part of his own girdle.

Then he looked up and found a circle of stalwart warriors, with good-natured smiles on their faces, looking down at him and his companion, as peaceably as if they had never intended him harm.

Slowly, and much bewildered, he struggled up into a sitting posture, when one of the warriors came forward and held out his hand to assist him, saying:

"Sabbona, moomzan, sabbona!"

He had heard from the soldiers that this was the common Zulu salutation, and equivalent to "Good-day, sir, good day!" and he made shift to say, feebly, "Sabbona."

Instantly the smiling faces expanded into the most good-humored grins, as the whole party cried out in chorus:

"Sabbona, sabbona, mfolotso, sabbona!"

Completely bewildered now, he said in good English:

"What in the world do you mean?"

To his still greater surprise a voice answered:

"They have heard that you are American; that's all."

Austin turned to look for the speaker, but saw none but Zulus round him.

CHAPTER VII.

THE CONVOY.

ASSISTED by one of his late enemies, Albert Austin rose to his feet and stared round him to discover who had spoken English to him, but could see no one, for the Zulus had made a circle, with their broad shields in front of them, and he could not distinguish the dress of a white man anywhere.

He spoke aloud in English a second time, asking: "Who spoke? If you are a friend let me see your face."

Again the voice came from the circle, and he could have sworn it was a huge, muscular warrior with a scanty beard that spoke. The man was almost naked, with the figure of a bronze gladiator, and his hair was plastered up with some white paint into a ring round his head, in the form of a coronet, decorated with ostrich plumes.

He had heard from the soldiers that this was the mark of a married Zulu, called by the Dutch settlers a "ring-kop," and he noticed that his late foes all wore the same head-ring, and had uniform black shields. Impressed with the idea that the big warrior had spoken, he addressed him earnestly, asking:

"Is it possible you speak English?"

The savage lineaments expanded into a broad grin, as the old "ring-kop" answered:

"Kah! kah! Zulu! Zulu!"

He knew enough to understand that "Kah!"—pronounced with a strange click of the tongue—meant "No," and that he had mistaken his man, so he asked in English:

* Zulu for "Stop! Stop!"

"Will not the man who spoke step out, that I may thank him for my life?"

This time the voice sounded behind him and said to him:

"Ask no questions. Be satisfied you're safe. They are going to take you to see the king, if you will promise not to give any news of importance to the enemy."

Something in the sharp, metallic tones was familiar, and Austin answered:

"I think I know who you are, now."

"If you do, ask no questions," retorted the voice, and Austin rejoined:

"All right. I don't pretend to understand you; for you seem to have the secret of disguises. I'm ready to go to the Zulu king, if I can have liberty to paint his portrait."

He did not try to identify any one any more, but turned to his wounded friend, who was now beginning to recover under the ministrations of the little savage, in whose simple, smiling face Austin was confident he recognized the dwarf Zip, whom he had seen in the Adirondacks.

He spoke to Louis, who awoke quite sensible, and smiled as he feebly answered:

"All right, old fellow; it's nothing."

And all the Zulus, lately so ferocious, beamed out in smiles and cried in chorus:

"Kashla pakoola! Sabbona! sabbona! Mfana belungu."

"What are they saying?" asked Louis, wonderingly. "Are they going to cook us for dinner?"

The English voice again answered:

"They are saying, 'Well done; good-day, white boy; that's all.'"

Louis heard it and looked around, asking:

"Who was that spoke, Austin?"

"A friend who does not wish us to know him, though he has saved our lives," responded his friend, in a low tone. "It's the mad hermit, I'm sure; but I can't recognize him among all these black men. Come, get up; I'll help you."

And he raised his wounded companion to his feet, when one of the Zulus brought him a cow's horn full of water, and made signs for him to drink, saying:

"Mauzi kashla mushla, mushla."

Louis didn't understand a word; but he supposed it meant "Good water," and he was right. The burning thirst of his wound made it very grateful to him, and he drank it eagerly.

Then the same Zulu handed the horn to Austin, whose head was still painful enough to induce him to drink deeply. He noticed the water had a bitter taste, but thought nothing of it in his thirst, and the first notice he had that anything was wrong with him was when he began to stagger like a drunken man, when a stalwart Zulu caught him in his arms, and, pointing to the sun, said:

"Ilanga libalele; belungu lata."

"The sun's hot; let the white man sleep," said the English voice, as if translating; and Austin felt his eyelids sink in spite of himself; his last sensation being that of gentle motion, as if he were being carried on a litter.

As to Louis, he made even less resistance to the narcotic that had been administered to him, and both young men were soon sleeping heavily, while their dusky conductors carried them forward on a rude litter, hastily constructed out of their broad bull's-hide shields and a few poles.

Then a man, who had been standing behind the circle of warriors, came forward and said to the Induna or chief of the *impi*:

"The white men are safe now. Let ten of the warriors take them to the great town, while the rest go forward. The wagon-train I promised you must be near at hand; and these men are no good to us, save that they are my friends. Let us proceed."

The Induna nodded, and there was a deep chorus of:

"Kashla mushla! Si hamba, Mumzan." [Very good. We go, sir.]

Then the Induna told off ten men, who started across country with the two litters, while the rest of the *impi* swept away over hill and valley, almost invisible in the long grass; a few scouts went ahead, to creep to the tops of the hills and survey the country, as they progressed to where they knew from the stranger that a British transport train was coming toward the army from a distant post, with a rather weak guard.

The man who had given them the intelligence was the same singular being who had already made such a stir at Colesberg Koppy, with the dwarf mute Zip, and whom Austin had identified in his own mind with the mysterious hermit of the Adirondacks.

In dress and external appearance he and his dumb attendant closely resembled the Zulus with whom they were now associated. The negro was naked and plumed like the rest, and the white man wore a suit of brown fleshings that enabled him to pass for a Zulu at a short distance, while his long hair was done up in a head ring, and plumed, just like his companion's woolly locks.

There were many young Zulus in the *impi*, nearly as light as himself, and the only point of difference between them was that he carried no shield, and that he rode, while they walked.

Pretty soon they saw one of their scouts drop flat on the top of a hill, come crawling back, and make the Zulu signal of an enemy in sight.

In a moment the Induna gave a short, shrill whistle, and down went his men into the long grass, disappearing from sight as completely as they had done before the two Americans, when the stranger, addressing the chief, said:

"My Lord Dabulamanzi is wise. Let him stay here, and I will draw the attention of the guards another way."

Dabulamanzi—he was brother to the better known

King Ketchywayo, and had commanded the *impi* which destroyed the British army at Isaublwana—nodded his head and replied:

"We will wait till the American chief has gone out of sight, when we will creep forward. Let my brother chief do his best, and he shall have the man he wishes, if he be in the train of the white men."

"And it is understood that your young men are to kill none but the blue and red-coats, and are to leave the women and children unhurt?" said the American, interrogatively.

"It shall be done as my friend the American Induna wishes till he has chosen his captives," was the reply. "After that, the rest of the men must be killed, no matter how they are dressed."

The stranger nodded, beckoned to the dumb dwarf, and went away at the full speed of the herd of swift zebras, which huddled together as if afraid to part company with each other, and were out of sight in a few minutes.

The Zulu *impi* remained hidden in the long grass till the odd-looking little cavalcade had swept out of the field of vision, when Dabulamanzi uttered his shrill whistle, and they began to steal forward through the grass in a long wavy line, curling round the hill on the top of which still lay their scout, peering over the edge at the enemy.

They knew from his signal which way the train was coming, and their decoy cavalcade had gone that way, but the rest went stealing round on the other side to cut off the enemy's retreat.

Meantime, on the other side of the hill, in unconscious security, came a train of more than a hundred British wagons, escorted by two companies of infantry and a large squad of the Natal mounted police, in their blue coats and black helmets. In the midst of the train, and accompanied by quite a troop of horsemen, in the rough dress of colonists, but all well-armed, were three huge Cape wagons, bearing on their tilts the inscription which showed them to belong to Morelli's "Great Moral Show."

The enterprising manager, having reaped even more than the harvest he had counted on at the diamond fields, had taken advantage of the protection of the troops to join the train to Durban and Port Natal, in company with a number of rough miners, who, their business being broken up, were determined to join the volunteers to "fight the cursed niggers."

They had kept careful guard up to that day and fancied that their troubles were nearly over, for already they could see the distant smoke of the campfires in the fortified post of Helpmakaar, at which lay a British commander with nearly three thousand troops.

Therefore all were in good spirits, the miner volunteers cracking jokes and singing songs, while they chattered to the show people, making a little party all to themselves; when Morelli, who had been the loudest of all in his rough banter, was suddenly seen to turn deadly pale, and begin to mutter to himself in Italian as he gazed out on the plain.

There, between the train and the Tugela river they were approaching, he saw the little herd of zebras flitting along, with their dark riders equipped as Zulus.

The miners followed his eyes as they looked that way, and recognized the figures, when there was an instant handling of firearms and a commotion in that part of the train.

The eccentric cavalcade flitted along and attracted the attention of the soldiers, who called out to one another, while their officers rode up and down the column, ordering the wagons to close up.

All suspected it was some Zulu trick, but no one seemed to know what it meant; for the men on the zebras rode by them at a distance, and kept coursing back and forth as if only observing them.

But Morelli, who appeared to have gotten over his first panic of fear, now insisted on taking his wife and children out of the wagons, and placing them in two light mule-carts he had bought at Colesberg Koppy, when he drove off at once toward the river, followed by a number of the miners, leaving the train to proceed alone.

The showman had armed himself and his people, and the miners were all rough fellows, used to shooting, so that they made quite a formidable array as they went off, though the officers of the train warned them not to leave the escort.

As for the train itself, it was doubled up and marched toward the nearest ford, and still no Zulus made their appearance, while the mounted scouts—if such they were—offered no opposition to the move.

At last they were all down to the ford, and had begun to cross in full sight of the garrison at Helpmakaar, who could be seen coming out of the fort to cheer the approach of the convoy, when all at once arose the terrible Zulu war song from the country round them, and out of the long grass started a dense black cloud of naked warriors, who had crept unseen to within striking distance, while the body of the train was huddled on the banks of the river.

Instantly rose the shout of: "Zulus! Zulus! Save yourselves!" and the soldiers began to fire in all directions.

But no fire seemed to daunt these bronze warriors, for on they rushed to close quarters in the terrible Zulu charge, singing the Song of Chaka.

CHAPTER VIII.

A LESSON IN ZULU.

WHEN Albert Austin awoke from the deep slumber into which he had been thrown by the Zulu narcotic given to him, he found himself in a dim light and lying on the skin of some animal. His head was still a little dizzy, but this cleared off and he was able to survey his place of abode for the time being.

Over his head stretched an arched frame-work of poles, terminating in a small round hole and covered with straw. It was evident he was in a native hut, called by the settlers a "kraal." Opposite to him he could see the low doorway, about high enough to enter on hands and knees, though it was now covered by a hanging mat, which made the hut dark and gloomy.

He looked round him and saw that he was alone, while his couch proved to be a handsome lion-skin.

He crept to the door, raised the flap and looked out, to be nearly blinded by the glare of the African sun, while in front of the tent was a group of Zulu girls, slender and graceful as antelopes, chattering to each other as they set down their water-pots on the ground.

The slight sound of the moving mat caught their attention, and they turned around their pretty smiling faces on him, showing magnificent rows of white teeth, as they said in chorus:

"Sabbona, mumzan, sabbona!"

"A polite people, these savages," he thought, as he came out, bowing and saying in return "sabbona."

The girls seemed to be delighted at hearing him utter a single word of their own musical language and laughed like children as they replied.

Then the young man began to realize that a single word of a language is not enough to carry on a conversation; for the girls began to chatter to him in the most animated way, and he could not tell what they meant.

He tried English, and asked loudly:

"My friend—where?"

He wanted to find Louis, and had a sort of idea, not uncommon, that simple words with gestures and shouts, ought to make a Zulu know what he meant.

But the girls only laughed and tried to imitate his words:

"Ma flena—wa."

He noticed that they seemed, like Chinese, unable to say the letter *r*.

By means of a great deal of gesticulation he managed to make them understand he wanted something—but what it was, none seemed able to divine.

He looked about him in despair of being understood, and saw that he was in the midst of a town of native huts, arranged in an immense oval, and full of women and children, though no men were visible except a few old white-heads, bending over long staves as they hobbled from hut to hut.

An idea struck him; he would make the girls teach him Zulu.

He slapped the hut with his hand and asked:

"This—what is it?"

A pretty tawny girl with great dark eyes smiled, chattered to her companions and imitated his action, saying:

"Inthloo—Inthloo."

He repeated the word inquiringly, and they chorused laughingly.

"Mushla, mushla, Inthloo."

"Mushla must mean 'yes,'" he thought, "and Inthloo 'hut.'"

This was one step, but a little one; so he slapped his own breast and asked:

"Me—what in Zulu?"

The girls looked puzzled, and one of them asked him gravely:

"Ufunani, mumzan?"

Of course he jumped to the conclusion that *Ufunani* meant "white man," whereas the girl was really asking him "What do you want, sir?"

So he sailed on boldly, saying:

"Mushla, mushla, 'me,' *ufunani*, 'you'—what in Zulu?"

As they did not seem to understand this, he pointed to his pretty questioner and tapped his own breast saying:

"Me *ufunani*—you, you, what?"

The girl stared at him in amazement and then burst into a scream of laughter with all her companions, calling out something in which he could only make out the words, "*Belungu funtombi*," and then the whole group took to their heels and ran away, screaming with laughter, spilling the water from their jars and leaving him alone, with a vague notion that he had made some very ridiculous blunder.

He heard the girls screaming to each other and a great commotion going on in the village, and presently an old man with a long white staff came toward him, saluting him with the politeness which he had noticed among all the Zulus, and making him a long address, touching the hut with his staff and frequently repeating the words, "*Belungu funtombi. Ehéne, ehéne.*"

While the puzzled artist was trying to make out what he meant, he saw a huge crowd of girls and boys coming toward his kraal, the boys clashing their shields and spears, while the girls were dancing round the pretty creature who had given him his first lesson in Zulu.

They all came up and executed a song and dance, full of grace, circling round the hut; and then the old man led the girl up to him and placed her hands on his shoulders, while she smilingly seemed to take the greatest interest in the whole ceremony.

Then it suddenly flashed on him what the thing meant, and he burst into a fit of uncontrollable laughter, in which all the girls joined.

They evidently meant to marry him to this dusky maiden, under the idea that such was his wish.

But how to get out of the scrape into which he had unwittingly fallen was the next question; when all he knew of the language was "good-day," "house," and "yes."

Even he could see that these words would put him deeper into the mire, when he suddenly remembered the Zulu word for "no," and shouted, slapping the hut:

"Kah, kah, mushla, inthloo."

What was his surprise to hear them all singing a new song, while, in the space of a few seconds they tore the hut to pieces.

Then they raised a shrill cry, and the boys scattered and returned again, all carrying poles, with which, still singing a song and dancing, they made a new house before his eyes, and danced round it, singing:

"Inthloo, inthloo, inshley inthloo."

Evidently here was another mistake. They thought he had not liked the old house, so they built him a new one.

He thought next of disclaiming the girl by saying "Kah," to her; but he did not dare to insult a lady in such a public manner, and was positively at his wits' end what to do, when he spied the well-known figure of the zebra rider galloping into the village, and at once ran toward him, calling out:

"Come here, quick! These people want to marry me to some one."

The stranger turned his parti-colored steed toward the crowd of girls, and shouted to them something which made them scatter at once, when he came up to Austin, and the latter poured into his ears the story of his singular adventures.

The other listened with a grim smile, and, when Austin had finished, dryly said:

"Mr. Austin, in future don't think you know a language till you've been at least a year in a place or had some chance to study it. You've only got two words right. The girl asked you what you wanted, and when you pointed to her she thought you wanted to marry her. The old man was probably her father, who was telling you how many cows he would expect for his daughter's dowry. Don't try to talk to girls any more. I'll tell them about the mistake. The *impi* will be back here in a few hours, and that girl may have a lover among the men, who would stab you as quick as he would a sheep if he thought you meant to insult his possible betrothed."

Austin, considerably crestfallen, asked if he could not see his comrade Louis, and the other replied:

"Certainly. The men have orders to treat you with the utmost courtesy till you are well and take you to see the king as soon as your friend's wound heals."

"Then the sooner I see the poor fellow the better I shall like it," returned Austin, at which the zebra man smiled and led him off to the very next hut to the one he had lately occupied, where he found Louis still lying in a heavy sleep, quite oblivious of the noise that had been made round him.

It was nearly an hour more before he awoke, very hungry, and as soon as their voices were heard there came a tap at the mat hanging over the door, and a good-natured looking Zulu peeped in and said in broken English:

"*Induna Samerika* sendee me see gentleman—me Baléle—me speakee Engeez goot, goot. *Ufunani, mumzan?*"

He closed in his native language as if the exertion were too great to continue his English and Austin asked him:

"Where did you learn English?"

"Boarded shippee, *mumzan*. Ow do-do-do-do-you-do-do? Me goot Engeez."

He was as proud of his slender stock of words as Austin had been an hour before, and when the artist asked for food for his friend he grinned delightedly and brought them out to a huge pot boiling on the fire, which he told them was:

"Goot meatee, allee samee bordship."

They were too hungry to quarrel with the invitation and dipped into the pot with an iron fork, Zulu fashion.

But before they had finished their meal came a tremendous yelling all over the town, and presently they heard the deep notes of the warriors singing their song of triumph as they came back loaded with plunder, blankets trailing from their shoulders, muskets in their hands, which they fired recklessly in all directions over the huts, while the *Induna Dabulamanzi*, proudly seated on an officer's charger and carrying a double-barreled gun, galloped to and fro, yelling in a most undignified but truly African manner.

But what struck our friends most was the presence in the midst of the yelling *impi* of a number of men tricked out in all sorts of theatrical finery, glittering with tinsel and evidently objects of great envy to their companions.

Finally Louis clutched his friend's arm and whispered:

"Good heavens, Austin, I know that cap; it is Morelli's magician's cap. They have come from Colesberg and must have killed every one there."

He looked so stricken with terror at the idea that Austin, who felt a sort of sinking at his own heart, called to Baléle, who was so proud of his scraps of English, and asked him where the Zulus had gotten their finery.

Baléle promised to find out and went off among the warriors, presently returning with the information that the men had killed a whole British *impi*, and had found these things in the wagons of the English; that a number of white men with the women and children had run away over the Tugela, and that the garrison at the fort had helped protect them from the pursuit of the Zulus.

So much at least they gathered from the confused mixture of Zulu and English in which the man told his story, and Louis observed, gratefully:

"If the women and children got over in safety it is all I can ask. Nina at least was not killed. But this mad hermit was at the bottom of the attack."

"And that's just what I think," remarked Austin.

At that moment the very person they spoke of approached them, and beckoned them to one side.

CHAPTER IX.

THE FLITTING.

THE singular man who thus summoned them to his side, half Zulu as he was in outward appearance, nevertheless spoke in good English, saying:

"Gentlemen, I have a favor to ask of you. Remember that, but for me, you would have been rid-dled with Zulu spears."

Louis bowed rather stiffly and replied:

"We are aware of our debt of gratitude, but from what I see among your eager savage allies you have perhaps killed some of our friends."

The stranger's eyes glared in a singular way as he asked:

"What friends?"

He seemed to be putting a constraint on himself to speak calmly.

"Morelli and his family," answered the young man, boldly. "It seems to me that a man of your acquirements, at the head of an army, even of savages, has little business to try and crush a poor showman and murder innocent children."

The eccentric stranger listened to him with compressed lips; his blue eyes, with their cold glare, contrasting wonderfully with his dark, sunburnt face.

When Louis had finished, he said dryly:

"That is your opinion. I did not ask it. I asked for a favor."

"What is it?" demanded Louis, shortly.

"It is to return to the British lines at once. I will see you are escorted there safely. I myself shall not be among the Zulus very long, and cannot protect you any further."

"But you promised to let us see the king, and that I should take his portrait," urged Austin, anxiously.

"You can do that now. The king is here and willing to be painted. I have had your horses and things brought here. But I want you to go back to-night to Durban, and then you can do what you please. I ask you this, in consideration of having saved your lives yesterday."

"Yesterday!" echoed Austin. "What! have we slept a whole day?"

"I meant you should. Your comrade there has had time to put his arm right. Will you do me the favor, I ask?"

What could they do but submit graciously and pretend to be willing, though they were both intensely interested in the brave, simple and courteous people they were cast among so singularly?

No sooner did the stranger receive their assent, than he said, with some warmth:

"I thank you greatly. I could not leave you, having given my word to protect you, and moreover you are Americans. Come with me and I will show you the king."

He led them to the midst of the town, where was a collection of huts differing from the others in being raised on walls about six feet high, with doorways large enough to enter by stooping considerably.

Here their companion introduced them to the presence of a man of very tall figure, with an immensely powerful and corpulent frame, who, they were told was:

"*Ndabezita Inkozi Tchwayo*" was as near as they could get the sound of his name, which meant, "Your majesty, King Tchwayo."

The king had a very austere and awe-compelling face, but he turned out to be a very jolly and companionable fellow, full of fun, like all the Zulus, but with a reserve of fierce dignity that was roused in an instant by the least approach to familiarity.

He graciously consented to sit for his portrait, and stalked out of the hut clad in a sort of kilt of leopard's hide, with feathers in his head-ring, and carrying a long spiked staff of ebony, which served him for a scepter.

Then all the Indians came round and formed a background of dark faces and figures, singing a deep-toned song of "hail to the king," while the monarch looked as if all mankind were far below his notice except as a matter of kindness.

When the portrait was finished, however, he condescended to look at it, and his features expanded into a smile of inexpressible pleasure, which presently became a broad grin and finally a roar of laughter, when the whole population jumped up and began to stamp on the ground and shout the war-song, clashing their shields and spears.

In fact, it seemed as if the whole town had suddenly gone mad over the king's portrait, and the gratified monarch at once ordered a whole herd of cattle to be given to the "*Induna belungu Samerika*," or "white American chief," for having given to the world the likeness of the *Inkozi Emkocwini*, or "King of Kings," as he was styled.

That evening the two young men, mounted on horses taken from the British officers to replace their own wounded beasts, and accompanied by a body of panther-like young warriors, headed by the ingenious and accomplished Baléle, who talked English so well in his own opinion, rode out of the Zulu town down to the river Tugela, and found themselves, to their surprise, not ten miles from the British outposts.

The night being dark and moonless, they did not know where they were taken, and it was only when morning dawned and they saw before them, about five miles away, a straggling town of white houses, that they began to realize that they must be well within the limits of Natal.

"What is that place?" asked Austin of the tireless Baléle, who had been running beside a trotting horse all night.

"Durban," was the answer. "You go now; we go backee. *Sala Kashla, mumzan.*"

The young man had learned enough Zulu to know this meant "Rest in peace, sir": equivalent to "Good-by;" but he felt some alarm as to what

would become of his escort, especially as he could see camp-fires all round the country.

"Won't you have trouble in getting back, Baléle?" he asked. "What will you do if you meet English soldiers?"

Baléle laughed and said something to the young warriors with him, who all laughed in chorus and cried:

"*Si quaza-oguquaza belungu.*"

"Dey say dey kill, finish white men," explained Baléle; and then the whole party bowed and clashed their shields, crying out:

"*Hamba kashla, mumzan.*" [Go in peace, sir.]

They filed away into a thicket by the roadside—for they had come to roads now—and that was the last the young men ever saw of the brave and devoted warriors who were to see their last fight in that memorable year, learning when too late that all their leonine courage and simple weapons were not enough to contend against the far-reaching firearms of modern times.

Our two friends rode thoughtfully along toward Durban; and after a long silence Louis burst out:

"I don't care what people say about the power of civilization; there's more of the gentleman in those naked savages than half the white men we shall have to meet in that town ahead of us."

"Perhaps you'd like to go back and live among them," returned his cooler companion dryly. "They wanted me to marry and settle there."

Louis blushed and smiled.

"No, no, that's different—and—heavens!—why did I forget it? We've not found out yet if Nina is safe. Come on."

He spurred his horse and they rode into Durban, where they found out, in answer to their inquiries, that a portion of the fugitives from the destroyed convoy had passed through town the day before, going to Natal, "as hard as they could leg it, your honor; and they say there was a lot of show people among 'em. They was goin' for the transport 'Imalaya, 'er as brought the Ninety-second, 'cause she's goin' right back to England by way of Aden and Suez; so if yer honor wants a passage you'll jest 'ave time to get there afore she sails, if you kill yer 'osses a-doin' of it."

They rode on to Natal as fast as they could, but not quite fast enough; for as they came to the bluffs above the bay they saw the smoke of a distant steamer on the horizon, and learned that the *Himalaya* had sailed an hour before. The *Indus*, another transport, was unloading; and they found that she would take a few passengers to Bombay, whither she was going in a few days, to bring a brigade of Sepoys to take part in the war.

Louis Bonnelle was so anxious to follow Nina that he hunted all over the port to find some vessel that promised to sail sooner, and after a long search came back to his friend with the news:

"I've taken passage for India, and we sail to-night. You must go along with me, Austin, for you promised never to leave me. You can send just as good pictures from India as from here, and if you won't go, I'm going alone."

Austin looked up from the drawing he had just finished, with a resigned air, saying:

"Rather than let you go alone, I'm ready; for, to tell the truth, Louis, I don't look on you as a responsible being just now. What's the ship, and where does she go?"

"It is the English clipper *Firefly*, Captain Stubbs, bound for Calcutta."

"I'll come," was the answer of his friend. "I've seen enough of Africa to last me for awhile, and I want to see a Hindoo snake-charmer."

CHAPTER X. THE CAPTAIN'S STORY.

OUT on the dark waves of the Indian Ocean, tipped with silver under the light of the tropical moon in its full glory, the good ship *Firefly* was bowling along past Mauritius, under a cloud of studding-sails and sky-scrapers.

She had caught the south-east monsoon, fresh and constant as the Atlantic Trade Winds, and was making her fifteen knots an hour, day after day, without need to touch a brace.

Upon the poop-deck in the moonlight, on this loveliest of nights, sat honest Captain Stubbs, ship-master, of Wapping, smoking a cigar given him by one of his passengers; and, close to him, lounging on camp-stools, were Louis Bonnelle and Albert Austin.

"You must have seen a good deal of life, captain," observed the artist, puffing a curl of blue smoke over the water. "How long have you been at sea?"

"Thirty-five year, man and boy, off and on, as a body may say," was the honest tar's reply. "And, I tell you, gents, I've see'd a many queer sight in my time."

The two friends were in just that lazy humor, tired of the monotony of the ship, when they were ready to listen to any sort of story, and Austin observed, with a sly nudge to Louis:

"Suppose you tell us about some of them, Cap. Nothing I like better than a yarn."

"Ah, Mr. Austin, I could spin lots of 'em, wonst, but you gents ain't sailors, and wouldn't care to hear about the same old shipwrecks and whalin' v'y'ges."

"Oh, yes, we're agreeable. Tell us the most wonderful thing you ever saw," asked Louis.

"The most wonderful thing I ever saw?" echoed the old sailor, with a sly twinkle in his eye. "Well, that's hard to say. I wonst see'd a landsman trying to make out he were a sailor, in a theayter, and that was somethin' amazin'. But, come to think on it, that reminds me of the queerest cargo I ever had in my life, going to Australey."

"What was that, captain?" asked Louis, scenting a story, as the old sailor settled back on his chair.

"It were a lot of circus folks as belonged to the

great Hinternational 'Ippodrome, as they called it, goin' from San Francisco to the city of Melbourne, in '64," was the captain's reply. "They 'ad camels and elephants and lions, and all that sort of beasts, and chartered a whole ship to take out them and their company. A 'eap of trouble I 'ad with them on the trip, what with the beasts fallin' sick in a storm and the rest, but 'twar'n't nothin' to the trouble they 'ad in Australey arterwards. Ah, that was a 'ard thing."

And Captain Stubbs shook his head as if he were ruminating over something that caused him sorrowful memories.

"But, what was it?" asked Austin, whose curiosity was excited by the old sailor's manner.

"It was jealousy, and murder, and the dickens to pay, generally, Mr. Austin. Howsumdever, I may as well spin the yarn reg'lar. You know that them circus fellers is allers tryin' to cut one another's throats, as a body may say, runnin' against each other, tellin' lies, puttin' pieces in the papers, and all sich things. Well, it seems as 'ow the Hinternational 'Ippodrome 'ad been fightin' another concern called the Cosmopolitan Combination, all the way from New York to Frisco, from the time they started, runnin' the same towns, and spendin' money like dirt to steal each other's thunder. I didn't know it when I took the Hinternationals, but it seems the other fellers had stole a march on 'em in Frisco, and had sailed for Australey a week ahead, to get first whack at Melbourne and Sydney. The chap as run the Coz. Com.—as we called the other show for short—was a Italian called Morelly."

Austin and Louis started and looked at each other, but did not interrupt the captain, who went on with his story:

"'E was a good-lookin' feller—I see'd him arter we got to Melbourne—and some'ow he always got the best of the Hinternationals, who was managed by a old gent called Bailey, and a good many of the Hinternationals was a-grumblin' about it, aboard ship, the women worst of all. I s'pose you've noticed, gents, as women allers talks a good deal, and is fond of makin' eyes at the men, and so it was in that show. There was one woman, special, I noticed. She was a mighty pretty creature, as used to do a tight rope act in tights; though she was a married woman with a kid—a bit of a baby not three years old—and 'er 'usband was a little chap looked like a boy, though they said he was one of the best hanimal-tamers in the business. 'Is name, as I remember it, was Romer—Milo Romer—and he was a Yank—beg parding, gents, no offense—a Hamerican. 'E was the last man you'd ever 'a' picked out for a wild-beast tamer; for he looked more like a counter-jumper, with his pale face and dapper ways, though they said he was as strong as a 'orse. Well, to make a long story short, there was trouble between 'im and 'is wife all the way, for she were a most houterageous flirt, and 'e was as jealous as a Turk. I 'eard 'er once say to 'im somethin' 'bout Morelly as made me think there was trouble between them, and when we got to Melbourne I was mighty glad to find the other show had gone to Sydney. So we landed."

"But surely you've not finished?" asked Austin, as the captain paused and fell into a brown study.

"No," he answered, rousing himself with an evident effort, "but I don't like to tell the rest. It's bad, gents. Howsumdever, I promised, so I'll do it. The Hinternationals got ashore, set up their tent and give a show. Of course I went to see it, and a fine show it were till it came to the middle, when Mrs. Romer—as they called Mamzell Ernestine on the bills—was to do the flying trapeze and tight-rope act, jest before 'er 'usband went in to the lions. There was a 'itch there, and old Bailey come out and said as 'ow Mamzell was sick and couldn't come on that day. I slips round to see the boys, and finds out that the woman 'ad slipped off with the kid, leavin' a note to 'er 'usband to tell 'im she was tired of bein' watched and spied on, and that she'd run away to Morelly, who was a gent as would be kind to 'er. I see'd Romer when he read the note, jest as white as a sheet and tremblin' all over, and jest then old Bailey comes ragin' in, and tells him: 'You must go on at once, Romer. I can't 'ave my show all broke up for a lot of useless jades. We'll get even with 'em in Sydney.' And then the little man he smiled—oh, sich a smile!—and answered: 'Wery well, Mr. Bailey. The show shall go on. I'm ready.' And with that, sir, the pore feller, all shakin' and tremblin' at the news of his wife stealing the kid and running away to another man, went out into the ring, bowed to the people and in another minute was into the den with the beasts. I see'd the animal men look anxious, and I 'eard one of 'em say: 'Get near the cage, Bob. 'E'll get 'urt to-day.' I knowed the beasts was sulky arter bein' aboard ship so long, and Romer 'adn't been in to 'em all the voyage. And then, you know, gents, a man wants all his wits about him among wild beasts. Sure enough, afore 'e'd well got to work, one old lion got into a corner, turned cantankerous and showed fight, when Romer hit 'im on the nose sich a wipe as I never see'd a mangive afore. The old brute struck at 'im with his paw and got another worse one, and he was jest a-gettin' cowed down when some one in the crowd sings out somethin' in Italian to Romer. I seen the man rise up and shout, and they told me arterwards it was Morelly himself."

"Morelly!" echoed Austin. "Why, I thought he'd gone away."

"Seems not, gents. His show was aboard the vessel, but he'd come back, as it seemed, on purpose to steal Romer's wife. Anyhow he was there, and Romer knew the voice, even in the middle of his fight with that old lion, for he turned in a moment and made a spring for the door of the cage. That was the last of him. The moment his back was turned, the lion, only half beat as he was, made a spring,

and there was the pore fellow down, with the brute on top of him, and all the people yelling bloody murder. The circus men rushed at the cage, jabbing hot irons at the hanimal, and managed to drive him back and pull out poor Romer, all covered with blood, with his scalp hanging down over his eyes. Sich a sight I never see. But when we'd got him out and come to look for Morelly, the furrin thief had cut his stick and we never saw him again in Melbourne."

"And Romer, did he die?" asked Louis, anxiously.

"Not as I knows on, gents, but he might better have done it. He was all tore to pieces, and old Bailey had to leave him behind, while they went on to Sydney, where they found Morelly had made Ernestine the great feature of his show, firin' her out of a cannon and all sich games, and coinin' money out of her. I see'd her there myself and she was sich a reckless devil she used to take the kid with her on the tight wire;—enough to make your blood run cold to see the danger. But she come to a bad end at last."

"How was that, captain?"

"It was in Honolulu, near a year after, when the Coz. Com. come in, on the way back to Frisco, and I dropped in to see them. I found quite a lot of the old Hinternationals with 'em, and they told me Morelly 'ad broke old Bailey up at last, scattered his show, and taken the best of his folks into his own concern. The only thing he wanted was a animal man, so he had to be content to let his menagerie go without a den of performing beasts. Well, gents, I went in to see their show and a very fine one it was, and full of people from all over the country; for shows don't often come to Honolulu and the people go mad over 'em. And as I was in the menagerie who should I see, in shabby old clothes and looking round in a queer, dazed sort of way, but pore Milo Romer, the tamer, whom I'd seen so chawed up at Melbourne. He was dreadfully changed, thin as a post, his hair all long and tangled, with a wild glare in his eyes as if he'd been drinking hard. He kept his head down among the Kanakas, as if he didn't want any one to see him, and when the show went in I saw him shrink back as if he didn't want to see the circus part. Romer and I had always been good friends, and I felt so sorry to see him looking so shabby that I went up to him, shook hands, and asked him if I couldn't do anything to help him. He didn't even seem to know me at first and looked dazed like. He even took off his hat and rubbed his forehead as if trying to recall me. I noticed, as he did so, that there was a broad red seam over the top of his head, where the scalp had healed over and the hair had fallen out, though otherwise he seemed to be unmarked. He was just saying: 'Oh, yes, I remember,' when we heard the cannon fired off inside the circus tent, and at the same moment a great scream from all the people. I knew some accident must have happened, and I rushed in, forgetting all about Romer. Brrrrr!"

The old sailor shuddered all over with utter horror at the recollection of what he saw.

"What was it? What had happened?" asked both young men in a breath, and the captain went on in a low tone:

"That poor unfortunate fool of a runaway wife of Romer had met her end at last. You know how they do the cannon act? There's a terrible strong spring in the cannon, and the woman stands on a plate. They fire off some powder as they touch the spring, and call it 'shootin' a woman out of a cannon,' but it's a dangerous thing if all ain't done just right. The gal's got to stand stiff and hold her breath to get sent flying into the net. If she's limp she gets knocked all into a heap. And Morelly always did things in the most dangerous way to draw folks. He had his cannon up on wires fifty feet from the ground, and made Ernestine walk a wire to get there with the child in her arms, and both get fired out together. I tell you, gents, it made every one hold his breath to see 'em. Well, this time it seems there was some hitch; the woman had got careless or something; anyway the gun went off, and she was pitched out all in a heap, fell short of the net, and came down headforemost on the 'ard ground, child and all, where they both lay, stone dead."

The listeners uttered a suppressed cry of horror, and the old sailor continued:

"But that warn't the worst of it. That poor creeper Romer heard the noise too, and came rushin' in, yellin' like a wild man, laughin', and dancin' as he hollers to Morelly some Italian words I never could understand like '*Veny detty*,' and I'm blest if he didn't spit at the poor woman's body, and was goin' to give it a kick when he sees the pore little dead kid. My gracious, gents, I never heerd sich a howl in all my born days as he let out then. And he picks up the pore little dead body and runs away with it to Morelly, who was standing there, palé as a ghost, and he screams out to him in English: '*You did this! You! You!* You made me lose my fight with the lion! It has been *your* turn. *Now it's mine!*' Then he made one leap and sent both feet into Morelly's face, knocking him stiff. Sich a trick I never seen before. And then off he runs like a deer to the menagerie, and in less than five minutes I'm blest if he hadn't let all the beasts out, he yellin' all the while and carrying the poor little dead kid in his arms."

"Why, he must have been stark staring mad," cried Louis, excitedly.

"He was, gents; as crazy as a loon; mad as a March hare. Sich a scatterment you never see when the beasts came out, and the wonderful thing was not one offered to attack Romer. They seemed to know him. The city was all in a fright for a week; Morelly's show was broke up; and when they found poor Romer at last, he was out in the woods,

half-starved, but still carrying the dead child in his arms."

"And did they catch him?" asked Austin.
"After a terrible fight they did, and sent him to San Francisco, where he was shut up in the lunatic asylum. I heard he died there the year after."
And the captain threw the stump of his cigar into the water. The story was over.

CHAPTER XI.

THE SNAKE-CHARMER.

A SKY almost black in its indigo expanse spreads overhead, without a speck of cloud to dim the vast dome.

In the midst, casting its shadows straight downward, blazes a mighty sun, with the intolerable heat of millions of white-hot furnaces. Streams of transparent gas ascending from the parched ground, make all the landscape quiver with a strange ghostly glimmer.

Far and wide, over baked field and jungle, spreads one uniform tint of grayish brown, as if everything were resolving itself into dust and ashes. Elephant and tiger, boar and buffalo, slink away to the deepest recesses of the forest to couch in the mud of the shrunken pools and pant away the heat of the day.

Through the midst of this land of tropical fervor, brown and sluggish; its tepid waters thick with the dark slime of thousands of acres of rotting bog and jungle; the black snouts of crocodiles shooting to and fro above the surface, hunting for the bloated corpses that go floating down the oily stream, flows the sacred Ganges, past the pagoda temples of a great city, dozing in the fierce glare. Such is Benares, City of the Saints.

All along the river bank one may see the *ghants*, lofty flights of white steps leading down to the edge of the water from the temples above; and here, even in the full heat of the terrible sun-blaze, troops of white-robed Hindoos are bringing down their dead to the sacred stream to launch them on the road to Paradise.

On the summit of one of these *ghants* stand two young men in the white dress of Europeans, with muslin turbans round their broad puggaree hats, and they are curiously watching the funerals, when they hear the distant whistle of a locomotive, and one of them remarks:

"There comes the train, Austin. Let's go."
"What an impatient fellow you are," retorts his companion, lazily. "It won't be here for an hour yet. These Indian trains loaf along at half-speed, picking up cotton bales and passengers whenever a native waves his umbrella to stop them."

"But you know who's on board," urged Louis, entreatingly. "Consider my impatience and come along, there's a good fellow."

Austin shrugged his shoulders.
"At least let's come by way of the bazaar. It's cooler in there. I don't want to get sunstruck to oblige a young lunatic, running after a girl he never can marry."

Louis Bonnelle sighed as he answered:
"I can't help it. I worship the very ground she walks on, Austin. I don't know what it is draws me after her so much, but I cannot resist it."

"If you had to work for your living as I do, you'd have to resist it," grumbled Austin, as they strolled toward the bazaar. "It's my opinion you'd be better off if your father put you to work to make you forget your foolishness. But there, there, don't get angry over it. I'm here, and I'll see you through. After all, this wild-goose chase shows you a good deal of the world."

They walked on through the cool shady bazaar, where the shopkeepers were all asleep and only a few passengers stirring, and Louis, who had been musing for some time, broke out:

"I don't know why it is, but that story of old Stubbs about the lion-tamer haunts me all the time. I can't help suspecting that Milo Romer is not dead after all."

"I never thought he was," rejoined the artist. "It's plain to me that Milo Romer and our mad hermit of the Adirondacks are one and the same person. How he got out of the lunatic asylum and whether he's as mad as ever, are questions I can't decide; but that fellow we met is no amateur. Beast-taming is a regular profession, and few men are capable of following it."

"Yes, and if it be he, we can understand now how bitter he must be against Morelli. But isn't it singular he should have kept out of his way all these years? He seemed to be surprised when we mentioned Morelli's name, and certainly Morelli had forgotten all about him, or we should have heard something about it before he followed the show to Natal."

"I think that part is not inexplicable," returns Austin, thoughtfully. "Madmen lose all memory of the past, I'm told, till it is recalled to them, and if he escaped from the asylum it must have taken him some time to get to the Adirondacks and make that collection of wild beasts. The queer part of the thing to me is, where he picked up that dwarf idiot, Zip, and how he got to Africa. It takes money to travel, and he must have got money somehow."

As he spoke they heard the whistle again, and soon after came to the station, just as the train rolled in, when they forgot all except the object of their search.

They had learned by telegraph that Morelli's show, after a successful season in Bombay, was coming east to Calcutta, on the road to Japan and Australia, and had resolved to intercept it at Benares, where the Indian Railway had a station, as at all the principal towns on the Ganges river.

One of the first faces they saw on the platform was that of the Italian showman, who greeted them

with affected surprise, but real delight; and informed them that "Mamzelle Nina 'ave make a great success in Bombay, and is so vell she vill be fire out of de cannon once more at Calcutta, a feat ve 'ave not been able to do fo' more dan von year."

"Indeed?" asked Austin. "Has she been sick then?"
"Yes, signor, she 'ave a accident at Havana, and de doctor forbid de cannon act streetlee. But my familie dey 'ave been educatee vell, and Nina she sing, as you 'ave 'eard 'er. I t'ink I make 'er sing de song in de cannon at Calcutta. Dat vill draw de people."

"Perhaps," answered Austin, shortly, and he thought to himself what a selfish, grasping brute was this father, that could expose his only child to such peril for money.

But he said nothing, and they got aboard the train, where Louis Bonnelle soon found his way to where Nina Morelli was seated with the stout madame, looking more lovely than he had ever seen her.

As the train rolled away Austin took a seat where he could watch his friend closely, and noticed that the girl's demeanor toward him was very cold and repellent, though Madame Morelli was all smiles and servility.

It was the first time he had ever had a good chance to do this, and Morelli himself, detecting his purpose with true showman's instinct, tried to draw him into conversation and divert his attention elsewhere.

But Austin was too old a traveler to be diverted from his purpose, and managed to use his eyes as well as his tongue, till he suddenly turned the tables on Morelli by asking:

"Did you ever know a man of the name of Milo Romer, Mr. Morelli?"

As he had expected, the question disconcerted the Italian, who changed color, stammered and replied hesitatingly:

"I—know Romare?—yes—no—dat is—de man is dead long ago."

"Ah, yes, so I heard. A man was telling me a story about him the other day—"

"Vat story?" asked the Italian, in a husky tone, his eyes glittering ominously. "You 'ave been listen to bad stories about me, signor?"

He looked as if he were inclined to quarrel with Austin on the spot, but the artist answered in the coolest manner:

"About you! Why, I was asking about a man of the name of Milo Romer, who used to be an animal-tamer; that's all. I thought that, being an old showman, you might have come across him in your travels."

Morelli was looking at the artist in a half-fierce, half-apprehensive way; but the cool placidity of the other baffled him, and he slowly answered:

"Yes, I did know Milo Romare. He was de king of de tamers, I vill say dat; but 'e die in de city of San Francisco twenty year ago, signor."

"Didn't he have a wife?" pursued Austin, in the same indifferent tone.

The showman started visibly this time and drew in his breath with a hissing sound.

"Who has told you dat?" he asked, in a tone that left no doubt he was seriously angry.

Austin pretended not to notice, and went on:

"Oh, I met an old fellow who was talking about all the shows he'd seen, and I mentioned your name to him; when he told me what a great manager you had once been, with a concern called the Cosmopolitan Combination, I think—was that it?"

A ray of pride passed over the Italian's face as he said, regretfully:

"Ah yes, signor, dat vas a grand show. In dose days I vould not 'ide my 'ead to Barnum or de Lents or Forepaugh or any of dose fellows. I vas de king den. Ah Dio! dey vas times!"

The memory it called up seemed to sadden him, for he fell into a fit of musing from which he was roused by Austin's next question.

"What broke up that show, Morelli?"

"Ve 'ad bad luck, signor; dat vas all. I 'ave bad luck dese twentee year, I t'ink till I get to de diamond feel."

"Ah, you made a pretty good season there?"

"Passable, signor; I do not complain. De Zulu war 'e broke me up, but I take monee—yes, I do not complain. Bombay goot place."

"Ah, by the by—that man Romer—was he ever with your show?"

Again the Italian started and became reticent and suspicious while Austin watched Louis and Nina Morelli at his leisure. At last the showman answered slowly:

"No, signor, 'e vas not in my show. 'E vas in de Bailey show and vas keeled by de lion."

"Ah, indeed. That was in San Francisco, I suppose?" said Austin, carelessly.

"Yes, sare, it vas dere, yes, yes. 'E vas keel by de lion—yes—yes."

He spoke slowly as if with an effort to gain time for memory—or invention—and kept his eyes turned away from Austin, who calmly pursued his queries.

"Let me see, you said he had a wife? What became of her? The man said she was the first woman fired out of a cannon. Is she alive?"

"No, signor, she die—at San Francisco."

Austin watching him furtively saw the sweat stand out on his forehead in great drops and observed, compassionately:

"It's very hot; isn't it?"

"Ah Dio, yes." And the badgered man wiped his brow and changed his seat to an empty one where he fanned himself vigorously, ever and anon glancing furtively at Austin, who had spread himself out on the seat and was to all seeming endeavoring to keep cool.

On went the train till the shades of evening closed over the landscape, when they stopped at a little village, where a little dried-up Hindoo came into the car, carrying a basket which was closely covered and which he set down on a seat near Austin.

Pretty soon the young man became sensible that a peculiar perfume came from the basket, musky and sickening, and something induced him to tap the man on the shoulder and ask:

"What have you got in there?"

He had noticed that the white men, as a rule, in India, treated the natives as slaves and asked whatever questions they pleased.

The little Hindoo was full of obsequious politeness in a moment, answering:

"Yes, *sahib*, yes, me *buckra cobra wallah*—you want see cobra dance?"

And he began to open the basket, when the artist hurriedly interrupted:

"Never mind now—I understand—you're a snake charmer. But don't trouble yourself—good heavens, man, shut 'em up. I don't want these brutes out here."

He had started up in unconquerable alarm and disgust as the weakened snake-charmer was coolly opening the dangerous basket, when the other laughed slightly and observed:

"*Buckra sahib* no need 'traid. Mahloo *buckra cobra wallah—salaam*."

He grinned as he spoke, and Austin moved his seat back some distance, when he noticed Morelli looking intently at the charmer and presently heard him say:

"How would you like an engagement to travel with my show, *cobra wallah*?"

The little man shrugged his shoulders.

"Mahloo *buckra cobra wallah*, great charmer, allee *sahib* come see him at Calcutta. No wantee trabel."

"But I'll give you good wages," persisted the showman, who scented a new attraction. "Here, let me come over by you."

And Austin saw the two enter into a whispered conversation which lasted some time, till he was roused by his friend Louis coming back to him and saying, abruptly:

"Come back to the platform car. I'm going to smoke. I want to talk to you."

Austin rose with a smile, hidden by the darkness of the night, and followed his friend to the open platform car, with nothing but an awning overhead, where a number of Moslems were smoking their hookahs.

"Austin," observed the young man, after a short and rather awkward pause, "I begin to think you were right about Nina. I'm making a fool of myself about her and that's the honest truth of the matter."

Austin tranquilly smoked his cheroot without saying a word to encourage his friend who went on presently:

"I don't believe she cares a button for me, and I've made up my mind to go home from Calcutta. I'll not be the sport of a fickle jade—"

"Fickle jade! Isn't that rather strong?" observed the artist, with affected indifference. "Didn't you tell me she'd never encouraged you?"

"And that's the worst of all," burst out Louis, in tones of angry vexation. "She won't—no, I was wrong—by Jove, she's an angel—but she does not care for me any more than for her old slipper, and—what do you think, sir? I told her so just now and she actually smiled and said: 'I'm glad you have found it out at last!'"

"Well, that was frank, at least," observed Austin, his heart beating strangely as he spoke. "So you're off with her for good? Is that it?"

"I suppose so," was the gloomy answer, and then Albert Austin felt a thrill of pleasure go through his own heart, as he thought that henceforth Nina was free from any entanglement with his friend Louis.

"I suppose," he observed, "that you won't go near the show any more. I'm rather sorry, because I wanted to take the girl's portrait."

"Don't let me deter you," interrupted Louis, eagerly. "It's true I'm off with her, but I don't want every one to know it at once. I'll introduce you now, if you wish, and tell her what you want. It will be a good pretext for me to be seen less with her to have you take my place."

"Thank you for nothing," was the dry reply. "If I wasn't confoundedly good-natured I'd say no, but, as it is, come along. I want to see how this little girl looks close by."

They went back to the car they had quitted, where the lamps were now lighted, and perceived the little show-party, now increased by the presence of the withered snake-charmer, clustered together and talking animatedly.

As they came near, the train slowed up to approach a station, and one or two of the passengers rose to get out.

As the train stopped with a jar there was a slight commotion, and the little snake-charmer jumped up with his basket on his arm and hurried to the door.

Almost at the same moment Austin saw Nina Morelli spring from her seat with a slight shriek, and begin to shake her dress violently, screaming:

"What's that? Take it away!"

In a moment the young artist had dashed forward, himself uttering a shout of horror and disgust; for there was a large *cobra capella*, or hooded snake, the most venomous of Indian serpents, erect on the seat beside her, and before he could interfere, the animal had made a dart and fastened its fangs in the girl's arm.

In the same instant Austin, with a quickness born of desperation, seized the creature by the neck and flung it out of the window.

There was a tremendous confusion in the car, in

the midst of which Austin heard a voice call out at the door:

"*La prima scusa della mia vendetta, Morelli. Gli altri poco tempo.*"

The language was Italian, and Austin knew what it meant:

"The first step of my vengeance, Morelli. The rest in a little while."

And the snake-charmer had vanished.

With a cry of intense agony of spirit the young man gazed at Nina.

She was pale and fainting already, as the venom entered her veins.

Then a sudden inspiration seized him, and he shouted aloud:

"She shall not die. I will save her."

CHAPTER XII.

THE ANTIDOTE.

"She shall not die; I will save her!" proclaimed the young man, as he supported the figure of the fainting girl. "Call a surgeon while I suck out the poison."

At the same moment he lifted her white arm to his lips, regardless of danger to himself, and began to draw away the venom from the bite of the cobra with all his strength.

Louis Bonnelle, who had been looking on in helpless terror, ran out on the platform, screaming out at the top of his voice:

"A doctor, a doctor. Where is there a doctor?"

In India, where the land is held by the power of a strong arm, there are troops at every station, and where there are troops there are generally doctors.

The news of a snake-bite in the cars had spread like wildfire, and as the train had stopped for water, there was no one to hurry it off.

Inside of ten minutes a stout old gentleman in undress military coat, with a red face and little white mutton-chop whiskers, busied up to the car, and called out:

"Come, come, don't crowd round the patient that way. Give him air. Where is he? What's the matter? Why, you don't say so—a lady?"

And in another moment Dr. McScallum had cleared everybody out of his vicinity except Austin, to whom he said, encouragingly:

"Suck away, sir; don't be afraid unless you've a sore lip. Don't hesitate to bite hard and draw all the blood you can. By Jove, you're a very sensible young man! If she lives, you'll be the one's saved her."

Then he asked how long since the bite was given, and how it happened; while he was pouring out some powerful spirits from a flask into a glass, and went on:

"Confound those cobra wallahs! they ought not to be allowed on the trains with their devilish beasts. He must have been uncommonly careless. Where is he?"

"Run away," cried a dozen voices.

"Of course, frightened at the consequence of his own carelessness. Here, my child."

He held the glass to the lips of the nearly insensible Nina and went on:

"Don't be afraid. It's the best brandy, double proof, and made into a tincture with Indian snake-root. It's what those cobra wallahs use themselves to cure bites. That's right. Drink it off. You'll feel better presently, though, by Jove, you've had a narrow escape."

All this time Austin continued unweariedly to suck at the poison, while the doctor, still talking, went on spreading a plaster with some dark-green ointment:

"Yes; I found out that root by accident, one day, after watching a mongoose fight a cobra. The little beast got bitten several times, and I followed it out to the jungle and hunted down the plant. I've kept it in my garden ever since, and this ointment's made out of the dry leaves mixed with lard. Now, young man, I'll trouble you."

He relieved Austin of his task, and placed the plaster on the wound, when he observed:

"Now you'll do with another good drink of my medicine. Who are you with? Who's your party, father, mother; where are they?"

Nina, who was lying back on the seat as if utterly exhausted, faintly moved her head toward her father, and Morelli came bustling up, to overwhelm the doctor with a torrent of thanks and blessings, which the other cut short by saying:

"You owe me nothing. I'm a doctor, paid by her majesty to cure people. It's my business. But as for this young man, if he'd not had the pluck to do what he did I should have come too late. Now listen to me. This child is safe for the present; but you must keep her quiet and free from excitement for at least three weeks, or she may go off into a fever of some sort. Blood poison is a bad thing. Give her a drink out of this flask every time she feels a little faint. It won't make her drunk now, any more than so much water. Send me back the flask when you get to Calcutta by the conductor, and now good-by. I see the train's ready to start. Good-by, young man. You take care of this flask. You've some brains."

A few moments later the kind-hearted and eccentric doctor was gone, and the train was moving on again, Nina Morelli lying with her head on Albert Austin's shoulder, he supporting her in his arms as if they were engaged lovers.

So close and sudden were the ties between two people, strangers to each other a little while before, welded by the presence of danger and death.

Morelli did not venture to interpose an objection. He seemed to be utterly cowed for the time, and Albert knew well enough why the showman had recognized the snake-charmer's voice, and knew that the man he had wronged, after an interval of nearly

twenty years and a simulated departure, was again on his track.

Morelli sat back in a corner of the car by himself, his face white and drawn, his eyes glancing in a furtive way from side to side, as if he expected again to see the dark figure of the cobra wallah.

Madame Morelli, who had been loudest in her shrieks at the beginning of the accident, now seemed to be perfectly indifferent as to how her daughter passed the night, and left her alone with Albert with the same obsequious servility she had of old displayed to Louis Bonnelle.

So the train rumbled on through the darkness; and as it went along, the heat, the fatigue and the motion sent every one to sleep, which was but little disturbed, as the car was only scantily full.

As for Austin, he had no thoughts of slumber, so delicious was the intoxication of his position beside this beautiful creature, whom he was already inclined to love more than reason.

He remained supporting her head; she being, as he thought, almost unconscious, till the regular breathing of every one in the car told him they were asleep when he looked round for Louis. To his surprise his friend had gone.

"Jealous, probably," he thought. "Well, it's not my fault. The girl doesn't like him, and if I can make her like me, I've a right to try."

He bent down to look at her, and found, to his intense surprise, the blue eyes wide open and staring up into his face with a trusting and childlike expression that was very winning.

"How do you feel now?" he whispered. "Will you take a little of the doctor's medicine?"

She still stared steadily at him, and presently her lips moved and she whispered back:

"You saved my life. I heard him say so."

"Oh, never mind that," he answered, smiling.

"It is time for your medicine, or you may die as it is, Miss Morelli."

"Call me Nina," she whispered. "You have a right. You saved my life, and—I can trust you."

There was something inexpressibly sweet to the artist in the look she gave him, as she nestled a little closer, and he involuntarily said:

"I hope you can, my child."

"And there are so few men a girl like me can trust," she whispered back.

"Indeed," he echoed, incredulously. "Why, have you not your mother to take care of you? No one dares to be rude to you, I hope."

She smiled faintly and replied:

"I have no mother. She is not my mother. I never knew my mother, I think."

"You think; are you not sure?"

"I cannot tell. Sometimes I remember a woman who used to kiss me and carry me about, but I am not sure. I remember, when father married Mrs. Garcia though. She used to be very kind at first; but since the boys came, she seems to want to get rid of me."

"And have you suffered much rudeness?"

She closed her eyes with an expression of aversion at the thought.

"Every one has been rude. It seems to me there are no gentlemen in this business."

"But then there is my friend Bonnelle; surely he has not followed the rest."

"He has been the worst of all," she retorted, looking straight into his eyes with her own clear gaze. "His very presence is an insult. He tells me he cannot marry me, and yet dares to say he loves me and asks me to love him."

Austin was silent for a moment, and then said in a tone of assumed severity:

"Come, you've fooled me long enough. It's time to take your medicine."

"If you say so, certainly," she replied, with perfect docility, and she drank off the bitter draught, saying:

"It is very bad, but I'll do it for you. I wouldn't have done it for the doctor."

"But for your father?"

"I don't know that," she retorted, with more spirit than he had given her credit for. "I don't believe everything he says, neither, I can tell you."

"Indeed, and why not?"

"Oh, you know well enough. It's the business. I hate it." She spoke with a great deal of vehemence, and then closed her eyes as if tired.

"Do you mean you don't like to sing in public?"

"No, it's not that; but the cannon business, the going out before all the people dressed like a boy. It's hateful. Do you believe girls were meant to do that sort of thing, Mr. Austin?"

She spoke with such simple directness that he could not help answering as he felt.

"No, I don't. I think it degrades them."

"I knew it," she retorted, with energy. "I could see it in your eyes when you looked my way, while you were pretending to talk to father. And I tell you, Mr. Austin, I'm glad I shall be too sick to do it in Calcutta, and I hope I shall never, never do it again!"

She seemed to be exhausted with her excitement, and laid back her head again on his shoulder while he soothingly said to her:

"Never mind, you are safe from it for some time to come; and who knows what may happen?"

She made no answer, and seemed to be dozing away till he tried to lay her head down on a folded coat to relieve his own shoulder, when she stirred uneasily and murmured, like a child:

"Don't go away; don't."

But he persisted, saying quietly:

"You will be cooler and more comfortable so."

"I wish you were going to stay with the show," she murmured. "You are my only friend."

"Well, I will, for a time," he answered. "Now you can go to sleep, can't you?"

She only smiled, but in a few moments her regular breathing showed she had succumbed to exhausted nature.

CHAPTER XIII.

PRINCE PUNJASA ROY.

In the outskirts of Calcutta, on the native side of the town, stands a great palace of brick and stucco, erected thirty or more years ago for a great Hindoo prince, who had been robbed of his dominions by the British Government when he was a baby in arms, but compensated for his loss of prospective power by an annual allowance from the revenues of his former dominions.

This allowance, while paltry for the needs of a prince of the Hindoo pattern, was sufficient to make its owner one of the richest private gentlemen in the world, and he had nothing to do but spend it on himself.

The consequence was that Punjasa Roy, at the age of thirty-two, was a polite, gentle, but thoroughly enervated man, who had run the whole round of Oriental pleasure and was pretty well tired of life, as the wily diplomatists of England had calculated he would be.

His ancient name, still a watchword over all that quarter of India where his father had ruled, might have made him a dangerous individual had he retained any strength of character; but Punjasa Roy, the voluptuary, was a nonentity, except to foreign travelers, who all made a point of seeing his palace, as one of the show places of Calcutta.

Punjasa Roy, a few days after the arrival of Morelli's show in the city, was lying on a sofa smoking his hookah, when his *kitmuggar* or steward brought him a letter of introduction and two cards, from which he learned that two "American sahibs" wished the privilege of seeing his palace.

"What sort of people are they?" he asked, lazily.

"Travelers, most illustrious, who have just come from Benares."

"Americans, you say? Let me see. They are the people who beat the English once on a time. I think—yes—I'll see them. Do they look like trading people or book-writers?"

"One of them looks like a book-writer. He carries a bag over his shoulder with a little book, and says he makes pictures for papers."

The prince straightened up. The only remnant of his native spirit was an inordinate vanity of his riches and personal appearance, that blossomed out in a craving for notices in the books of travelers and a mania for the multiplication of photographs of himself in all sorts of costumes.

"Tell Sam Jones, Bobby and Jack, I want them at once," he observed, briskly. "Let the strangers see the grand saloon, and wait there till I come to see them. Get out the nautch girls and tell the beast-keeper he shall have a visit to-day. There, that will do."

The *kitmuggar* salaamed and went away, while the prince, with the sudden and spasmodic energy of his Oriental nature, passed from the extreme of listless indolence to that of nervous and fidgety excitability as he hurried to his own dressing-room, where he was speedily attended by the aforesaid "Sam Jones, Bobby and Jack."

These worthies belonged to a class universally despised in India, both by whites and natives, as "Eurasians," and respectively officiated as barber, valet and groom to his highness.

Eurasians—as the name implies—are the half-breed children of Europeans and Asiatics, and, in nine cases out of ten, illegitimate.

The line of demarcation between the warrior whites and the subject Hindoos is so strongly fixed in the prejudices of both races, that a legal alliance by marriage between the two is practically unknown.

Most Eurasians are the progeny of Portuguese or French, and in Pondicherry and Goa they form a numerous class, which is far from being a respectable one; but in Calcutta they are scarce and the scum of the population.

Nevertheless, English half-breeds have a certain value as attendants to native princes, on account of their familiarity with the languages of two races, and their aptitude for the vices of both.

Sam Jones, the barber, had been in London in his time with his father, who had been a drum-major to an English regiment, and he had learned his trade afterward in Paris, whither he had gone as servant to a rich young officer of the regiment. His skill at shaving and hair-curling had recommended him to Punjasa Roy, and his servility and knowledge of wickedness in many climes had done the rest.

Bobby and Jack—surnames unknown—had never been out of India.

The barber shaved and curled his prince in the finest style of the art; the valet dressed him in a velvet tunic blazing with jewels, and Jack, the groom, received orders to have the four-in-hand ready at the door in half an hour, as soon as the guests had seen the palace.

In the mean time Austin and Bonnelle, the two visitors, were roaming round among the treasures of a saloon more than a hundred feet long by at least fifty in width, with a ceiling twenty-five or thirty feet high.

It was a strange mixture of magnificence and bad taste. There were costly and curious bronzes and ivory carvings; statues in Italian marble of most exquisite workmanship; a large chessboard with alternate squares of gold and silver, set on a heavy stand entirely composed of the latter metal, the chessmen being carved in ivory and studded with jewels in a curious but costly manner; there were two grand pianos and a dozen cabinets of curiosities; the floor was tessellated in elaborate designs of ebony and fragrant sandal-wood, while low velvet and brocade

couches were left carelessly lying round the huge saloon; and yet, in the same room, covering all the walls, were hundreds of vile-colored French prints of scenes in the Jardin Mabille and others of a similar kind, all cheap, vulgar and indecent.

"This Prince Punjasa must be a queer fellow," said Austin, in a low tone to his friend after they had scanned the incongruities of the chamber. "It seems singular that a man with such good taste in his furniture should show such execrable vulgarity in his pictures. I'm quite curious to see what he looks like."

"I didn't think he'd honor us by seeing us," answered Louis. "They told us that he was very haughty and distant to Europeans."

"Well, we'll find out pretty soon," said Austin, "for, if I mistake not, here he comes. Phew! what a stagey fellow!"

He muttered the last words under his breath as the door opened and the prince entered, preceded by a dozen nearly naked *punkah wallahs* or fan-bearers, who kept their bodies bent double before him, while they fanned him assiduously.

Punjasa Roy was a tall and exceedingly well-built man, with a regular, handsome face, as light as most Europeans, a soft, sensual mouth, half-hidden by a coal-black mustache, while his raven hair was curled into a hundred glossy ringlets, though by nature quite straight.

He was dressed in a tunic and cap of which the groundwork was green velvet, while diamonds, rubies, sapphires, emeralds and garnets were sewed in all over it, so that the whole coat glittered like a bed of jewels.

His legs and feet, on the other hand, were bare, save for a pair of slippers made of cloth of gold; and the sash round his waist supported a curved cimeter incrustated with jewels.

This glittering figure advanced to meet them, saying in English, marked by only a slight accent:

"I am always delighted into a Paradaical con-catenation of extraordinary and surprising sensations, in which patriotic satisfaction is the most important and profound element, when I hear of the arrival in the vicinity of this my sublimary abode, of illustrious persons like those I see before me, coming from the land of the great and immortal Washington, General Jackson, Mr. Stonewall, and Mr. Mintjulep. I bid you welcome and trust you will enjoy your visit."

Louis Bonnelle tried hard to restrain his laughter as he bowed before the prince, who gabbled off this singular tirade; but Austin with the gravity of a judge replied:

"We are charmed to see that your highness is so well acquainted with our American heroes, but for my part I am so delighted with all I have seen in this palace, that I only wonder at one thing being absent."

"And what is that?" asked the prince, eagerly.

"Is it billiard tables? I have two."

"No, your highness."

"What then? pianos, eight-day clocks, sewing-machines, guns, revolvers? I have all the American things in my house. I love Americans. There is nothing they have that I have not."

"Except an American bar, your highness."

"A bar! True, I have heard of that, how wonderful and delicious are your American mixed drinks. I must have a bar here in the corner of the saloon. It will be splendid for my friends. Where can I get a bar? Could I send for one?"

Louis had turned his back and was pretending to examine a bronze elephant, to avoid listening and laughing in the prince's face, but Austin went on:

"No need of that; you can get one made here. But an American bar is no good without a bar-keeper, and you can't find one out here in a hurry."

To his surprise the prince retorted:

"I have two Americans in my service to-day; one my horse-trainer, the other my tiger man. I will send for them both, and between them we will have a bar and a barkeeper, such as they have in the American palaces."

He spoke in his rapid Hindoostanee to one of his *punkah wallahs* and as the man went off the prince continued in English:

"I am resolved, whatever happens and at whatever cost, to make my palace absolutely perfect of its kind. If any one has anything I have not, I will spend a lac of rupees every day if necessary to get it."

Austin began to tell him that American bars were not set up in houses, but he waved his hand.

"Wait till my Americans come, and we shall see about it. Punjasa Roy must have all that any one has in the world. Here they are."

As he spoke two men entered the saloon."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE WHIMS OF A PRINCE.

The two friends were rather curious to see what sort of Americans the prince had induced to enter his service, but could hardly help laughing when they found that the first was evidently a half-breed Indian, who wore a sort of stage travesty of the costume of a Comanche chief, and eyed the visitors with a suspicious glance.

"This is Hole-in-the-Ground, my American horse-trainer," explained the prince, in his most grandiose tone. "He tells me his family has lived in America for thousands of years, and that his grandfather was in the war with the British, when your people beat them so badly. Aha! that was a great war, they tell me, with your Bull Run and your Bunker Hill. Is it not so?"

Hole-in-the-Ground said nothing, but gazed in the same suspicious way at Austin, who presently asked him in a tone of some curiosity:

"How did you get to this country?"

Hole-in-the-Ground grunted and looked at the prince, who answered for him:

"Only a poor devil, you know, who came in with a circus from Europe, and got left behind when it failed. I am going to have a private circus of my own some day, when I get enough people. Hole-in-the-Ground, do you know anything about a bar-keeper's duties?"

Hole-in-the-Ground grinned all over his face.

"Me smile. Drunk all time. You bet. Lemme keep bar for you?"

His tone was exceedingly anxious as he asked the question, but the prince answered:

"No, no, I want you for the horses, and Milo for the beasts. Tell me where I can get a man who understands American drinks."

"Ask Milo," grunted the Indian, and the two friends looked sharply at the second man who had come in.

He was a small person, very neat and dapper in his personal appearance, with a dark-brown face, short, curly black hair, and light blue eyes, which suited ill with his appearance. He was clean-shaven and dressed in clothes of the most faultless European cut.

"This is my tiger-man, Mr. Milo," said his highness, waving his hand toward the little man, who bowed slightly and stiffly to the others. "He used to be with me ever so many years ago, when I was a little boy, and came back to me only last week. He is the best tamer I ever knew, gentlemen, and that is saying a good deal, for I have always had the best money could get me."

Austin looked at the little man and knew him at once, in spite of a dark wig and the change in his dress, but pretended not to recognize him as he asked the prince:

"Where has Mr. Milo been all the time he has been away, your highness?"

The prince shrugged his shoulders.

"I never thought to ask. Where have you been all these years?"

"Traveling, highness," was the answer, in a reserved tone, as if he resented the question.

The good-natured prince laughed.

"Well, we won't ask too much. Every one cannot bear the truth at all times, eh, Milo? But that is not what I wanted to ask. Can you get me an American barkeeper? I want a bar in my house."

The little tamer smiled slightly.

"Easily. There are six or seven American ships in the harbor. Steal a steward if he knows the business. If not, telegraph to Bombay. You can get anything for money."

The prince was delighted.

"See it done at once, Milo; I want an American bar in my house in a week. How are the beasts to-day? Can you let them out?"

"If your highness wishes, certainly."

The little tamer always spoke in a curt, decided way, in short, crisp sentences, with a habit of shutting his lips firmly after speaking, as if biting off the words.

"Well, Milo, I am going to take my American friends through the house, and we will be in the tiger court in a little while. Be ready."

The tamer nodded—he used little ceremony even with the prince—and left the room, when Hole-in-the-Ground asked:

"Want show horses to-day?"

"Not to-day; to-morrow. Send out the drag to be ready for a drive."

Hole-in-the-Ground nodded also, and went off.

As he disappeared the prince said:

"I like those Americans; they are so rude. It is positively refreshing, after the manners of my country, to find men who say little, but do as they're told."

"How did you first come across this Milo?" asked Austin, a little curiously.

"He was a young man when I was a boy and he came here as a sailor," was the prince's reply. "My own tamer, Ali Fakoo, had just been killed by an African lion I had bought, and I wanted a new one. I told the English Governor of my wishes, and next day he sent the man to me. It seems he was not a real sailor, but had worked his way to Calcutta from some place where he had been shipwrecked with a circus he was with. I tried him and found him excellent, though I was afraid to trust him at first; he was so small. Ali Fakoo was a regular Hercules of a man. But Milo was as quick as a flash, and seemed to make up in tricks what he lacked in strength. He had my African tamed in a week, and was the first man I ever had who could take tigers out of a cage among strangers and keep them in control. He staid with me over three years, and then, all on a sudden, left me to go after a girl in an English show, who had bewitched him. I was sorry to lose Milo."

"And how did he come back?"

"He came quite by surprise, last week, with poor sailor's clothes, just as he did before, and only told me he had worked his passage here. So I was glad to get him again. I suppose he'll run away some day after another girl; but if money can keep him he shall stay."

"Then his clothes are all new."

"Milo goes to my own tailor," said Punjasa Roy, dryly, as if he had had questions enough. "Come, gentlemen, let us see the house. I have some things to show you that will interest you whose people beat the British at Bull Run and Bunker Hill. We will go to the armory."

They visited a magnificent armory, where Punjasa showed them a collection of fine steel armor, inlaid with gold, every piece of which had a history.

"This helmet belonged to my ancestor, Rammun Roy, who was the last Rajpoot prince to give in his allegiance to Aurungzebe. This saber was carried by my great-great-grandfather at the battle of Plassy

on Clive's side. He was the first native prince to welcome the English, and you see my reward to-day; robbed and cast out into poverty and exile. No wonder I love any one who hates the English."

The prince heaved a deep sigh which stirred his diamonds as he talked of his poverty, and Louis Bonnelle artlessly observed:

"It seems to me you don't suffer much."

The prince laughed good-humoredly.

"You Americans, how I like your rudeness! No, I do not suffer much, except in mind; but that is no consequence now. Let us go to the tiger court. You shall pat my tigers on the head if you like it."

"Thank you, no," was the hurried answer of Louis.

"I leave that to professionals. I am not anxious to rival our friend Milo."

The prince smiled in his good-humored way as he answered:

"Just as you please. I always pet them a little. You know we have a saying that a prince should fear nothing; and that is all I can do to show I am a prince who fears them not."

He led them from the armory through a delicious garden, cooled by heavy broad-leaved trees; full of peacocks, parrots and every sort of brightly-plumaged birds known in the tropics.

"Here you see my botanical garden and my aviary," he said, proudly. "I hear that there is nothing like it nearer than Batavia, where the Government have the place. Here is the wall and door, and now keep near me, for we shall be in the tiger court in another step or two."

They obeyed his injunction strictly, and he opened a low iron-bound door, which let them into a large, square court, surrounded by low stone buildings, of which the front was a row of iron bars, separated in compartments by stone walls, and roofed with broad slabs of stone, laid on iron girders, so as to leave cages at least thirty feet high by fifty or sixty feet long and as many wide.

A glance into the court showed that it was yet empty, and the prince observed:

"This is my own plan for a menagerie, to give the beasts a free range and keep them healthy. They have, as you see, plenty of room. Here are the tigers; on the other side the leopards, lions, and the rest; but I am proudest of my tigers. Look. There comes Milo into the tiger den."

They looked and saw that one side of the court was full of inclosures for tigers, of which there were thirty or forty of all sizes; and in one compartment, where were ten or twelve of the animals lying lazily about, they saw the slender figure of Milo, the tamer, coming toward them.

He had just opened a door in the back of the den, and walked into the midst of these striped savages as calmly as though they were domestic cats, and he their master.

He looked very small and frail among them, for he had taken off his fashionable clothes and wore only a little cap of cloth of gold, and a pair of trunks of the same, while his dark, sunburnt face contrasted strangely with his white body and limbs.

He carried in his hand a whip, but the brutes did not seem to notice him till he was in the midst of the den, when he snapped the whip and called out in English:

"Here, brutes, here! Come and take a walk."

Instantly there was a tremendous chorus of growls and roars, as the animals leaped up and came bounding round him and over him, in a manner that shook the nerves of the two Americans so much that even Austin drew back toward the door, and said to the prince, hurriedly:

"Good heavens, your highness, he's not going to let them out here, is he?"

"Certainly," was the tranquil reply. "Stay by me and look on. They are only glad to be let out. See; he is opening the gate."

In fact, the tamer, surrounded by the mob of ramping beasts, snarling at each other, and rubbing up against the bars of the cage, was opening a small gate in the middle of the bars, and, a moment later, out came, bounding toward the prince, ten gloriously beautiful Bengal tigers, all roaring together.

Beautiful they were, it is true; but with a cruel beauty that struck terror to the heart of both Austin and Louis Bonnelle, who found themselves drenched with perspiration in a single second as they stood there.

Austin felt his heart beat like a trip-hammer; but set his teeth hard, resolved not to let his nerve be shaken; and he was heartily glad of it a moment later, when the prince looked round and said, in a low tone:

"Stand still; if you show a sign of fear they will kill you out of pure fun. They killed three people last year."

And then up came the tigers, and one of them rubbed against Austin, looking up into his face with his great green eyes and growling.

CHAPTER XV.

A TRIAL OF NERVE.

AUSTIN kept his eyes fixed on those of the tiger and patted its head with as firm a hand as he could muster, wishing himself most heartily far away from its vicinity.

The prince, on the other hand, seemed to be quite at his ease, talking to and scolding the animals, kicking them out of his way if they became too roughly affectionate, and otherwise showing the truth of his boast that "a prince should fear nothing."

In a little while Austin became somewhat reassured as to the designs of the tigers, and had sufficient command over his own nerves to look round at Louis Bonnelle.

That unhappy youth was of an ashen-gray pallor, and trembling so violently that Austin said in a low angry tone:

"For shame, Louis! Don't disgrace our country before the prince by showing your fears so plainly. Grind your teeth and hide it, man."

Then he went forward beside the prince and cried out:

"Get out of the way, brutes. Out! out!"

He kicked one of them aside, and instantly it turned on him with a savage snarl, when Milo, the tamer, who was approaching, cried out warningly:

"Don't try it again, Mr. Austin. They don't know you as they do the prince. Stand still."

Austin looked angrily at the snarling tiger, but he was not sorry to obey the command to stand still; and the beast, after spitting at him like an angry cat, sulkily turned away and went prowling round the inclosure.

Louis Bonnelle in the meantime had been trying hard to master his fears, but he was obliged at last to call faintly to the prince:

"Take me out of here. I can't stand it."

The prince turned round with a smile and a look of extreme surprise.

"Is the gentleman an American really?" he asked.

"I am sorry I have tried his nerve too much. Milo, escort the gentleman to the garden. Please to wait for us in the summer-house, sir."

There was a slight flavor of disdain in his manner as he turned away to Austin, asking:

"Is your friend sick? He has a French name. I suppose it is that. The English have always, I believe, beaten the French."

Austin felt at once angry, ashamed and afraid; but he answered rather stiffly:

"In my country we have men of all races, but they are all Americans if they are born there. My friend is unused to beasts, and cannot conquer his nervous disturbance. It is a matter of temperament. Have not you some special dislikes?"

"Oh, yes," answered the prince, seriously: "I am very much afraid of black dogs, if they are small and shiny. I cannot control myself in that direction. But never mind; I see Milo has put your friend into the garden and is coming back. Now we will see the tigers fed."

The tamer came back and went to the end of the court, followed by the tigers, where he whistled shrilly.

A door opened in the side of the inclosure, just large enough to admit of the sliding in of a long trough, divided into compartments full of great heaps of rice.

Milo cracked his whip and dashed about among his tigers, flogging them into quiet and order just like dogs under a huntsman, and then led them to the trough, where they were soon devouring the rice as innocently as so many cats.

"That is the great secret of our control over them," whispered the prince. "These are all young tigers, brought up as cubs on rice and *ghee*—you know that is our name for butter of buffalo milk. They have never tasted meat, or they would not be so tractable. We cannot let the older ones out as we do these. Come round and see them."

He took Austin round to the cages where they saw a magnificent collection of beasts, of a size and vigor never seen in European menageries, and found them all restless and uneasy, pacing up and down, and watching the young tigers outside with evident jealousy.

"They know it is feeding time," explained the prince, "and would be much more excited but for the fact that we never let them get very hungry. Ah, by the by, there is my old African that Milo tamed, after the beast had killed Ali Takoo. That was twenty-four years ago. He is a different creature now."

He showed the American an old lion, with a long mane turned gray with age. The animal lay dozing in the front of the cage, and only opened its blood-shot eyes in a sleepy way as they passed, not seeming the least excited about feeding time.

Austin, after a few remarks about the lion, thought it a good time to insinuate a few more questions about the tamer, and asked:

"Has your highness any idea where Milo learned his trade, and what became of him in the interval between his first leaving your service and his present return to it?"

The prince yawned slightly.

"I never trouble myself about the private life of my servants outside of my house. If I do not forget, however, Milo told me he came from some place in America—let me see, did you not hang a man called John Brown once on a time?"

"Yes," said Austin, rather mystified; "in Virginia."

"Virginia? No, that was not the name. Something about John Brown's country, he said, and the name has escaped me—something like Ade—ade—Mondat—is there such a place?"

"Adirondack?" suggested Austin.

"That was it, I think. Did John Brown live there?"

"No; but there is a wild country near there called John Brown's Tract."

"That is the word—Tract—he told me he was born there, and used to tame the wild creatures in the woods when he was a boy. Yes—and then he grew up and went to school, and joined a circus, and traveled all over the world. He could talk a little of almost any language then, and he learned Hindoostanee very quick. However, I see he has fed his tigers. Now watch him put them into the cage. They are all full and lazy now. See how quietly they walk in. I tell you that man has a wonderful talent for animals. Did you ever know him before, Mr. Austin?"

He ended with this smiling question, showing that he, too, could probe another's meaning if he chose, despite his lazy amiability.

Austin colored slightly.

"I think I have seen him, but I am not sure. Tell me, has your highness noticed any change in his manner from that of former years?"

"Yes, yes," answered the prince, eagerly. "He has been strangely silent and sullen. He used to be full of good humor when I was a boy. But I attributed that to the change of years. I, too, have changed from what I was then."

The prince sighed slightly, the tribute of his conscience to a memory of energies wasted in ignoble pleasures.

Austin was silent, and the prince continued:

"Come, we have forgotten your friend. Have you seen enough of the beasts? Let us go."

They left the tiger-court and entered the garden, where they found Louis Bonnelle, looking very red and ashamed, as he rose to meet them, stammering an apology.

"I ask your pardon, your highness. I am not, I hope, altogether a coward; but I own that the trial was too much for my nerves. I am not used to seeing tigers at large."

The prince laughed. His vanity was tickled by the frank confession of the American.

"No matter, my dear sir. Come, shall we take a drive in the drag? Can you drive four-in-hand, Mr. Austin?"

He turned to the artist, as if naturally thinking him the leader of the two, but seemed to be a little surprised when Austin replied:

"I never tried it, your highness. I can ride and drive after my own rough fashion, but I have never been rich enough to own a four-in-hand or poor enough to have to drive one for a living. My friend Bonnelle here, however, is a good whip, after our fashion."

The prince turned to Louis.

"Can you really drive four-in-hand?"

"I have done so at home," was the reply in a rather frigid tone, for Louis was chafed at the veiled contempt of the Hindoo.

"Then, by all the gods of England and Hindostan," exclaimed the prince, slapping his shoulder in a familiar way, "you shall drive Punjasa Roy through the streets of Calcutta, and we will get upset in front of the Governor's palace. There is a lamp-post there which has the arms of the queen upon it; and I have made up my mind to break it down when I get a good chance. Dare you do it, sir?"

Louis laughed as he replied:

"Certainly, if you wish; but how shall we get home again? And what is your idea?"

"My idea is to have a new sensation in the papers: 'Punjasa Roy's last freak!' Oh! they'll all be full of it. If we can kill a sentry it will be fun. The horses are well enough for anything. Look at them."

They had arrived in front of the palace as he spoke, and there beheld a handsome English drag, painted a bright yellow, with scarlet wheels and a blue top, in front of which four bright bay stallions were dancing about on their hind legs, only partially restrained by as many black *syces*, or grooms, who all seemed afraid of their spirited charges.

"Dare you drive *them*?" asked the prince, with a saucy flash of his black eyes on Louis. "They are thoroughbreds."

Louis set his teeth, for his blood was up.

"I'll do it," he said firmly.

"Then count me out of the party," observed Austin, dryly. "I can't afford to risk my life and limbs behind those devils."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE MAD TAMER.

PRINCE PUNJASA ROY looked at once amazed and amused at Austin, but he was too thorough a gentleman to offer any opposition to the wish of his guest, and he blandly observed:

"Then you shall stay at the palace till we return, and I will give orders that the Nautch girls shall entertain you."

"Nothing I should like better," protested Austin. "I want to make a good picture of Nautch girls."

"My dear sir," exclaimed the prince, in his most enthusiastic manner, "if you can make me such a picture, I will pay you any price you may demand. I have never yet seen such."

He called out in Hindoostanee to his *kitmuggar*, and gave him a series of orders which made the obsequious Hindoo bow to the very ground in obeisance before the American stranger.

"I have told him to give you everything, anything you want; that the palace is yours till we come back, with every man, woman and beast in the grounds. Don't kill them all, however; for I am not quite tired of them yet."

Then he motioned to Louis, and the young man sprang upon the box of the drag and gathered up the reins. His face was pretty pale; but he had made up his mind to show no more fear before the scornful Hindoo; and he, who had shrunk from the merely imposing presence of the tigers, was now running into real and imminent danger, simply to show he was not afraid.

As for Punjasa Roy, that reckless voluptuary surveyed the excited horses with a cool smile, and then climbed up to his place beside Louis, and observed, serenely:

"Now, sir; if you please. I see we're going to have a runaway in any event. The fun in a smash-up is to shatter the carriage and not get hurt yourself. Now!"

He made a sign; the *syces* dropped off the horses' heads, and the four ramping beasts began to rear and plunge as if they wanted to smash the drag before starting. Both the wheelers made their heels rattle on the dash-board, and the leaders turned

round in their harness to bite the wheelers, while the prince lay back on the box seat, laughing immoderately.

But Louis Bonnelle had driven fractious four-in-hands before, and now he made his lash fly at the leaders in such skillful style that he turned them round, when a couple of spiteful cuts under the flank sent them bounding away as hard as they could pull, dragging the balky wheelers along by the harness.

In a dozen of these vicious bounds they had dragged the vehicle some ten yards, when Louis made his lash curl under the bellies of the kicking wheelers in such a severe way that they also moved forward.

Once in motion, what with a shout and great cracking of whips, the prince clapping his hands and still laughing immoderately, the whole team began to gallop, and in half a minute more were running away as hard as they could tear on the road to Calcutta.

As Punjasa Roy had predicted, a smash-up was only a question of time; and Austin shook his head gravely as he entered the palace, followed by the *kitmuggar*, who stood with downcast eyes awaiting "Sahib's order."

The artist took out his sketch-book, and found that he had nothing but a single pencil, so he told the steward he wanted proper material for painting.

He hardly expected to get them, but they were forthcoming in a few minutes, for Punjasa Roy had always kept an artist somewhere about the palace, a stupid Eurasian, who adored the cheap French prints he had induced his master to buy.

Next the American demanded the Nautch girls, and the words were hardly out of his mouth before they came into the room.

First came a dozen girls, pretty and graceful and magnificently dressed, who spread a white cloth over the middle of the saloon and then sat down at the edge and began to beat tambourines, play on mandolins and sing a sweet, mournful song.

Presently the dancers glided in, in their quaint costume, and began to sway and shuffle in time to the music, executing all sorts of graceful motions, but never lifting their feet from the white carpet.

Austin sat and took all sorts of fugitive outline sketches at first, to obtain attitudes, after which he seized his palette and began a bold study in colors, in which he was soon so deeply engaged that he forgot all about the fatigue of the girl who was dancing, and was only reminded of it when he saw her at last drop half-fainting on the floor.

Then he was shocked, and called out to the silent and obsequious *kitmuggar*, who stood beside him:

"Tell them I've had enough now. I only want her to lie there, just as she is, that I can paint her dress colors in that light. That'll be splendid. The Dying Nautch Girl."

The *kitmuggar* called out to the girl, who was wearily rising, and she fell back again, when the artist started a new study, which he had at last finished when a voice close behind him addressed him by name:

"Mr. Austin, what are you doing here?"

Austin started and looked round, to find the fierce blue eyes of Milo the tamer fixed on him with a singular expression of wildness.

He knew that the man was unsettled in his mind, from the captain's story of Milo Romer; but he did not know how far his lucid moments extended, and felt a little nervous as he answered:

"I am here on the invitation of the prince. You know that, I imagine."

"I mean, what are you doing in Calcutta?" responded the tamer, looking at him in precisely the same way in which he eyed his tigers.

Austin dipped his brush in the paint on the palette and replied in the driest tone:

"Because I choose to come here. Have you any special objection?"

The *kitmuggar* and the servants were staring in wonder at the two, but Austin noticed that the tamer seemed to be a privileged person, for none of them ventured to interrupt him, though his manner was decidedly rude.

The eccentric Milo seemed to be taken aback by the artist's coolness; for he answered in a more moderate tone:

"You have a right to go where you please, I suppose. Is your friend as great a fool as ever? I had a mind to set a tiger at him for his cowardice just now."

Austin laid down his palette and turned to the *kitmuggar*.

"Send the girls away and leave the room till I call for you. I want to talk to this man."

The obsequious Hindoo obeyed his orders, and the artist found himself left alone with a man he more than suspected of madness.

But for the fact that he was armed and had made up his mind to shoot the other if he offered any violence, Austin would have felt alarmed at his position; and as it was, his heart beat faster than its wont as he turned to Milo and said, in the firmest tone he could assume:

"Now, Mr. Romer, speak out and tell me what you want with me. I suppose you have not taken the liberty you have, unless you had some object."

He had made up his mind to treat the other as a reasonable being, as long as he could.

The tamer started visibly as he heard his name, looked confused, and passed his hand across his brow, asking in a low tone:

"Why do you call me by that name? I have not heard it for years."

"Because it is your own. I know your story, and I pity you the wrongs you have suffered. But why should you revenge them on an innocent girl who

never harmed you? I thought brave men scorned to war on women."

Again the tamer looked confused. The wild look had gone out of his eye, as he asked:

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that I am ashamed of you as a born American to find you turning into the cold-blooded assassin of women and children. Thank God for one thing, I saved you from one murder. The girl you thought you had killed is alive, and I saved her. Nina Morelli is not dead."

Milo Romer stared at him in a singular, intent way, as if the fires of reason were fighting hard against the mists of mania.

"Say that again," he repeated, slowly.

"Nina Morelli is not dead. I sucked the poison from her wound. Now, then, will you give up the pursuit of this innocent child, or shall I take measures to shut you up again where you belong?"

Austin spoke steadily and sternly, his hand close to his pistol pocket, and expecting an instant assault from the mad tamer.

To his surprise the other only smiled.

"I don't know what you mean. I am not Milo Romer. He died in San Francisco twenty years ago, and you will find his death on the asylum books there. I am not afraid of being shut up anywhere."

For a moment Austin was staggered, and then his readiness returned to him as he asked:

"Then how did Milo Romer die, and how do you know he is dead?"

Milo smiled again in a perfectly rational way.

"He killed himself, died, and was buried in the Sand Lots. I saw his grave afterward. The doctors stole his body, to cut up in the interests of science."

"Then if you are not Milo Romer, why do you persecute Morelli in the way you do?"

"I do not know Morelli. I never heard his name."

"But you know Romer, and you know that he suffered a great wrong from Morelli?"

The tamer began to twitch and his eyes glared. With the true inconsistency of a madman's cunning, he forgot his previous denial and burst out:

"Wrong, wrong? Do you know what it is to search for your baby month after month, and then to find her changed for another and killed in the face of all men before your eyes? Do you know what it is to have a home broken up in one swift moment; to find yourself the scorn and byword of a lot of coarse showmen, as the 'poor devil whose wife ran away from him'? Do you know what it is to be hooted at in public by the man who stole your wife, and called an infamous title before a tent full of strangers? Do you know what it is to be maimed and cut down in the flower of your health and strength by a brute beast you know you can beat on fair terms, and all through the tricks of the scoundrel who disgraced you before the world? Do you know this? Do you? Do you? If you don't, cease to importune me for Morelli. By the eternal and all-seeing Providence that sees us all, I swear I will never leave that devil till I have driven him to beggary as he drove me, robbed him of all his children as he robbed me of my little Alice, and made him a hissing and byword as he made me twenty years ago. You are his friend? Curse you! Take that!"

He leaped up in the air with the agility of a cat, and let fly with both feet at Austin's face in the trick of which the captain had told him. Had not the artist been warned, and furthermore had he not learned a good many boxing tricks, he would have been knocked senseless.

As it was, he dodged the terrible "Welsh kick" of the tamer, and in another moment started to one side, cocked pistol in hand, crying:

"Keep off, you mad fool, or I'll fire."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE PRINCE'S DRIVE.

WHILE Albert Austin was thus agreeably occupied in the palace of Prince Punjasa Roy, the prince himself, laughing heartily as if he enjoyed the thing immensely, sat beside Louis Bonnelle on the box of the drag, with four thoroughbred horses galloping like mad ahead of them, and seemingly determined to smash the drag.

The usual lazy manner of the Hindoo had changed to one of childish delight, and he laughed, clapped his hands and shouted:

"Go it, American! Take it out of them! The brutes are English! Thrash 'em! Curse the English!"

They were a good three miles from Calcutta, the day was as hot as a furnace, but the horses were so full of spirit that they didn't seem to mind it, though the white foam flew from them within five minutes.

When at last they began to slacken their pace the outskirts of Calcutta were reached, and the prince yelled excitedly:

"Lay on the whip! Thrash the English horses, and maybe we'll run over an Englishman."

He seemed to be crazily set on doing something to insult England—no matter what—and Louis, who began to feel he had his team under some control, now obeyed his directions, and lashed them to renewed speed.

As luck would have it, there were few vehicles in the street, and the foot passengers only stared at the whirling drag, and said to one another:

"Another freak of that Punjasa Roy. He ought to be shut up in a mad-house."

On went the drag, full speed; but full speed was beginning to lag again, spite of the whip, and Louis felt that he could pull up his team whenever he liked now. They were nearly blown.

The prince had forgotten all about the lamp-post of his enmity, and began to grumble:

"I'll shoot the brutes to-morrow. They've no half enough spirit. Turn to the right now."

They were just wheeling round the corner at the same furious speed, when they met a wagon coming toward them, bearing a flaming poster of a girl in tights being fired out of a cannon.

Louis swerved his horses just in time to avoid running into the other team; but his wheels were not so fortunate in escaping collision.

There was a tremendous bang and bump, a splintering of timber, and then the drag gave a lurch to one side and sent Louis and the prince flying through the air, the American holding on to the reins, till he landed on his feet in the road with a heavy jar, to be jerked off them in a moment more by the rush of the horses.

It was some seconds before he could pull up the frightened team, hauling the ruined drag along on its side; but they were too much exhausted to struggle, and when they were quiet he looked back to see how much damage had been done.

The drag had lost a single wheel; but the wagon with the posters was a perfect wreck, and the prince, in his theatrical dress covered with jewels, was standing looking at the ruins with a smile of perfect content, and talking to the driver of the other vehicle, who seemed to be appealing to him for payment of damages.

Louis looked round and found that a crowd had already collected, and plenty of willing hands were holding the horses; so he dropped the reins, went back to Punjasa Roy with a coolness as great as his own, and demanded:

"Well, what are we supposed to be going to do now, prince? I've smashed the drag as you told me; but not on the post. How are we to get home again?"

The Hindoo shrugged his shoulders and turned away from the protesting driver of the show wagon, observing:

"Apply to my steward. He will pay you. Don't bother me, you miserable rascal."

Then to Louis he said, in the driest of tones:

"As you observe, we cannot drive home. Let us go and see this show. I never saw a woman fired out of a cannon. Where is it?"

He asked the driver, who replied in an injured tone, as he looked at the ruins:

"You've smashed my wagon. Cuss the show. Who'll pay me for my wagon?"

The spoiled child of fortune frowned impatiently, and tore off two or three jewels from the frail stitching which held them to his coat, crying out:

"Here, you covetous rascal, stop your noise. Take these. Now where is this show?"

The driver became obsequious in a moment and led them round a corner, the prince leaving his costly team and drag in the midst of the street, without the slightest concern as to what became of them.

To Louis, who asked him what to do, he replied, in his usual gentle, careless way:

"The men will come after them, never fear. Hole-in-the-Ground and the outriders are on the road now, about a mile behind. They know my ways. Come to this show."

They came to a small theater, where the bills announced that Morelli had opened; and the figure of the Hindoo grandee, blazing with light, drew a crowd after him as he walked up the steps.

He went to the door, opened it, and found the theater empty and dingy to all seeming; but he walked in and called out:

"Halloa! Where's the manager here?"

The curtain was up, and a shabby young man came out from one of the wings, and said:

"There's no show till the evening, gentlemen. How did you get in? Please go away."

Then, as he caught sight of the prince, he bowed, stammered and broke down.

"Look here, you, sir," returned the amiable but lordly spendthrift. "Find me the manager of this show and tell him I want to see all he has, at once. Do you hear? I am Rajah Punjasa Roy, and I'll pay whatever he wants. Only be quick, for I am not used to wait."

The shabby young man bowed, rubbed his hands, and stammered:

"Certainly, your majesty, certainly. Mr. Morelli is in the building. You shall have a show, sir."

"And I want to see you fire that girl out of the cannon," said the prince, lazily, as he stretched himself on a row of seats. "If she is nice, I'll have her up to the palace. Come. Be quick there, you rascal."

The shabby young man vanished, and very soon after there was a bustle in the house, and Morelli came hurrying in, rubbing his hands, rushed to the stage door, and could be heard shouting out orders as the curtain dropped. Then, in a time that seemed incredibly short to Louis, the curtain rose again, and Morelli came on in his magic act.

The prince looked at him curiously for just one trick, and then he jumped up and shouted:

"Get off that stage! I keep better than that in my palace. Go, you rascal!"

With a manner of the most obsequious respect, the mortified manager bowed and shuffled off, leaving Master Giovanni to come on with his song and dance.

This seemed to please the prince, who cried out:

"Bravo! twice, and finally threw the boy a handsome sapphire from his breast."

Then he called to Morelli again:

"Now for that cannon! Where's your girl? I want to see her fired out of the cannon. Quick! Send her on!"

Then Morelli came out, bowing:

"So please your gracious majesty, my daughter has been sick, and is unable to do the cannon act

for a few days. She will sing you a song, if you wish."

But the prince, used to having his own way all his life, stamped his foot angrily.

"Miserable rascal," he cried; "send on your girl and fire her out of the cannon or I'll blow your house down over your head. You put up the picture, on your miserable wagon, and you upset my drag, and now I'll have the girl or I'll burn the house down."

He looked so savage, with his imposing figure and glaring eyes, that Morelli, completely cowed, said in his most cringing tones:

"Yes, your majesty, yes, for this once. It cannot harm her for once. Only have patience a moment."

"I will give you three minutes," said the prince, drawing out a magnificent watch. "If at the end of that time the girl is not ready, I will set fire to this house. Vanish, rascal!"

Morelli obeyed and ran behind the curtain, wringing his hands, to where Nina, in her stage dress, stood listening.

He dropped on his knees, sobbing:

"Oh, Nina, you heard what the Hindoo king said. We shall all be killed! Will you not save your father's life?"

The girl turned away from him with a proud gesture.

"Your life shall be saved," she said, "if at the expense of mine, so much the better. I am sick of this degrading life. Get ready the cannon. I will be dressed when you are ready for me."

And she ran to her dressing-room, while the manager prepared to do the bidding of the prince. He believed the wild threat of Punjasa Roy.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE WHIMS OF A PRINCE.

To those who have never seen the celebrated act of shooting a girl from a cannon it is necessary to say a few words of description.

In the first place the cannon is a sham, made of sheet-iron, and generally hung up in the air on wires. It contains a strong plate, on which the girl stands, while a very powerful spiral spring at the right moment sends her flying, any distance from ten to fifty or sixty feet in the air. At the moment the spring is released the operator ignites a charge of loose powder, so that the flame and smoke seem to be the means of propulsion.

Sometimes the girl is fired into a net, at others she catches a trapeze and begins the flying trapeze act, but there is always great danger of her falling short of net or trapeze, unless she stands perfectly stiff with inflated chest at the moment of being flung out.

This bracing against a shock of course makes it more severe to the frame; and no woman, however strong and healthy, can long suffer the terrible strain of the cannon act without serious internal injuries.

Louis Bonnelle had some little idea of the danger to which Nina was exposed; but, being a young man, his notions were vague.

The prince lay back on his seat, looking up, and saw the huge black gun aloft in the air, slung on wires. He noticed a man climb up to it by a wire ladder, and perform some mysterious ceremonies round it, and his curiosity was so far aroused that he forgot to look at his watch till the man came down, when he suddenly exclaimed:

"Time's up; it's five minutes. Where's the girl? Manager, manager, where are you?"

Morelli made his appearance, bowing and scraping.

"Yes, your highness, my daughter comes."

He vanished; *ting!* went the bell; the curtain rose again, and the prince uttered a cry of involuntary admiration and actually sat up in his seat and smiled, well pleased.

A young girl, with the figure of an Italian Venus or Powers's Greek Slave, fully revealed by the silk tights in which she was dressed, stood in the midst of the stage in the attitude of the huntress Diana.

A sort of tunic of blue satin, slashed with silver, and bordered with silver fringe, covered her body like the scanty vesture of a savage girl, but served to indicate the ineradicable native modesty of her sex, which refused to adopt the still more scanty trunks of an acrobat. She was beautiful, agile, and yet thoroughly feminine withal, even to the disdainful curl of the lip as she looked down into the parquet on the dissolute prince and the man who had followed her for love from the other side of the globe.

She advanced to the footlights, without so much as a bow to either, and at once began to ascend a wire, stretched at an angle to one of the galleries.

She used no pole, but walked as steadily on the almost invisible wire as if she were on the firm ground; and the prince actually held his breath in surprise, and then said aloud:

"Good! good! I must have her at my palace."

She is better than all my Nautch girls."

On went the girl up a series of wires, stretched at different angles, till she tripped along the last set that led to the gun, when the prince cried out in alarm:

"That will do; that will do! Don't fire her off this time. She's too pretty to kill. Tell her to come down. I want to see her."

Instantly the obsequious Morelli called out:

"Come down, Nina, come down! Do you not hear de gracious preence? Come down!"

Cold and clear came down the answer from the dome of the theater:

"You can make me do my act; but you cannot

make me come down to that man. I am ready. Fire the gun!"

Louis Bonnelle at that moment felt thoroughly ashamed of himself to be sitting by Prince Punjasa Roy.

Handsome and gentle as was the Hindoo, there was something so selfish and sensual in the way he had spoken of Nina, classing her with his Nautch girls, that his blood had boiled as he listened, and yet he hardly knew how to resent it.

The prince laughed when he heard the girl call down from aloft, and replied:

"Don't be angry about it. It is a small matter. I did not believe they would fire you out of the gun, but I see they are ready, and I would rather have it done at my palace. Come down, therefore, for I am going home. Here, Mr. Manager."

He rose and beckoned to Morelli, who came to him, bowing and smiling.

"I want you to bring that girl and the little boy to my palace to-night, and be ready to have her fired from the cannon there. My steward will see that you have all you wish, and are paid for this afternoon. In the mean time, give this to the young woman, as a little reward for her courage and beauty. It is a ruby that belonged to my grandfather, the Maharajah of Chooala."

He bent his head in a stately nod, and turned his back to go to the door, leaving the girl still up in the air, and Morelli looking mystified and astounded at the magnificence of the jewel in his hand.

As for Nina, she stood on the wire, leaning against the mimic cannon, completely at a loss what to do. She had never met such a character as the prince, and his quiet, lordly indifference piqued her.

He went out of the theater without another look at her, and she came down the wire ladder, safe and sound, without having been shot from the cannon.

In the mean time, the prince strolled out into the street; where to the surprise of Louis, who accompanied him, not knowing what else to do, they found the drag, with its lost wheel replaced, and accompanied by Hole-in-the-Ground and a dozen ferocious-looking mounted Hindoos, who all sported bristling beards, and were armed to the teeth, while a crowd of black coolies was gathered round them, staring open-mouthed.

"I think we can drive home, now," observed the prince, all whose energy seemed to have left him after the brief spurt of the runaway. "I feel sleepy. Let us get inside, and let the groom drive us. There is no fun in quiet horses."

He stepped into the drag, and instantly two of the ferocious-looking troopers leaped off their horses, climbed in behind, and produced an umbrella and fan to wait on the prince.

Louis got in in front, with his back to the horses; Jack, the Eurasian groom, took the reins, and Prince Punjasa Roy, with a cool selfishness that amused Louis so much that he forgot to be irritated, deliberately went to sleep as they drove back to the palace.

Within a very short time they arrived there, for the English horses had recovered their wind, and Jack was a merciless driver; and, as soon as the drag stopped under the broad-leaved shade-trees in front of the house, the prince opened his eyes, broad-awake in a moment, and observed:

"Mr. Bonnelle, you are a good driver. You shall see all my nice things for the pleasure you have given me. Let us go in and see if your friend has painted my Nautch girl yet."

They descended and entered the palace, where the first person they saw was the obsequious *kitmuggar*, and the prince exclaimed:

"What's this? what's this? I told you to attend on Mr. Austin. Where is he?"

The *kitmuggar* bowed his face to the earth and responded quietly:

"Sahib sent us out. Sahib in saloon with Milo. Told us to wait."

The prince stared but said nothing, and walked to the door of the saloon, just as the mad tamer, barked and confused, stood glaring at Austin, who had him covered by his pistol.

Punasa Roy, in this emergency, showed the best side of his character, its utter fearlessness; for he stalked across the room to the tamer, caught him by the shoulder and whirled him round, saying to him sternly:

"How now, Milo? Are you mad or drunk?"

The other quailed before his gleaming brown eyes, and Austin noted the fact. All the fury went out of the tamer's face, and the artist put up his pistol with the remark:

"Neither, your highness. Milo was only showing me a trick of fighting that he learned in his travels, and I was making a bet that he could not knock me down without getting shot for it."

The prince laughed and released the tamer, who stammered confusedly:

"Yes, yes, I lost the bet—I beg pardon."

He rubbed his hands over his forehead, and went on:

"I beg your highness to pardon me; but my head pains me at times in hot weather, and I do not know what I am doing."

The prince nodded good-naturedly.

"Well, well, go to sleep at noon as we do. To-night we have a good show of our own, Milo. Did you ever see a girl fired out of a cannon?"

The tamer turned deadly pale.

"Highness," he faltered.

"I'm going to have one in the garden in the evening, Milo, and I want your beasts ready to come out. Have them all fed, so that they will not be sulky. You understand?"

Milo bowed low, as he answered:

"I understand, highness; they shall be ready."

CHAPTER XIX.

THE MAN WITHOUT FEAR.

WHEN Albert Austin heard, as he soon did, from his friend Bonnelle, that the prince had made Morelli's show a visit and compelled the manager to promise to execute the cannon feat in the palace garden, with Nina for the heroine, he felt thoroughly alarmed.

"It shall not be done," he said, in a firm tone. "In the first place, the girl is in no fit state to execute such a dangerous feat after her recent experience with that madman's snake; and in the second, this palace is no place for a virtuous girl."

But how to stop the performance was a very different question; for the prince had set his heart on it, and was used to having things his own way.

Still Albert, resolved to do what he could, went to him openly, and said:

"Your highness is not perhaps aware that the feat you are about to compel a poor girl to perform is one of great danger to her, and that she is only just recovering from the effects of the bite of a cobra."

The prince smiled lazily.

"That is the business of the show people. I do not care to enter into that. I want to see the thing with my own eyes."

"Then let one of Morelli's boys do it. I tell you the girl is not able just now."

"My dear American friend," retorted the amiable voluptuary, "if I want to see a boy shot from a cannon I can order one of my servants in; but I have taken a fancy to see if this girl can do it, without being killed. If so, I want to keep her in my palace."

"Then I say that this thing shall not be done," rejoined the American, firmly. "I can stop it if I wish, and I will do so. I will go and complain to the governor and ask for a guard. Do you understand that?"

Punjasa Roy stared at him for a few moments with an expression of amazement that was almost comical. It was, perhaps, the first time in his life any one had opposed his will in his own palace.

Then the usual gentle glance of his dark eyes changed, and the bad side of the Oriental tyrant came out in an expression of pitiless malignity that gave him the look of a demon, as he said in low, smooth tones:

"I had heard that Americans were rude, but I never thought they were fools. Do you know who I am and where you are?"

"Both," was the undaunted answer. "And I know also that if you hurt a hair of my head, you will repent it."

The prince laughed mockingly.

"Were you an Englishman I might think you meant something; but Americans are nothing here. You shall not go to the Governor, and I will make you look at this cannon feat, as they call it, bound hand and foot."

He clapped his hands for the *kitmuggar*, and gave some rapid orders in Hindoostanee; then turned to Austin with the remark:

"You shall see if you can make a prince fear with your threats of the Governor—"

Austin divined in a moment that he was to be seized by force, and took his decision in that moment to escape.

The windows of the saloon opened on the piazza, and the road to Calcutta was outside.

Whipping out his pistol, he made a rush to the window, bounded across the piazza into the garden, and was at the gate before a servant was out to seize him.

In another moment he was in the road, in the midst of the blazing sunlight, when he heard the high, passionate tones of the prince screaming out in Hindoostanee, and then:

"Bang! bang! bang!"

Three bullets whistled by his head, and he heard the rapid patter of bare feet behind him.

He turned and ran toward Calcutta as hard as he could, and in a few seconds had passed the stone wall which denoted the front of the garden. The brief exertion caused the sweat to pour off him, and he felt so dizzy that he was obliged to stop and turn round, with the instinct of self-defense, when he saw a dozen of the prince's savage-looking troopers, rushing at him with their drawn sabers.

Leveling his revolver he was about to fire, when a loud voice behind shouted in English:

"Stop, you black beggars! What sort of devilry is this?"

And then, "bang! bang!" went a revolver, and the group of Hindoos broke up in a moment and ran back to the gate, while Austin saw an English officer, whose white trousers and turbaned helmet, with his blue frock, announced him as being on some active duty, ride up beside him, followed by a troop of black-bearded soldiers, with long bamboo lances and enormous turbans, whom he knew to belong to the First Punjab Lancers, on duty in the city.

The officer was a pale, languid young sub, whom he remembered having seen at a reception the night before, and who now said, in a tone of some surprise:

"I ought to know your face. American, I believe? What's the matter, sir? Has that blackguard Punjasa been trying any of his tricks on you? We came up just in time it seems to me. Are you hurt?"

Austin told in a few words what had happened, and the officer compressed his lips.

"I thought there'd be trouble when I heard he'd been racing through the streets with a white man on the drag. You see, sir, you're a stranger to India, and don't know these fellows. We have to keep them down like dogs since the mutiny, or they'd ride over us. Were you on the rajah's drag to-day?"

"No, it was my friend, who is in there now."

"In that case we must get him out, sir, or that scoundrel may do him a mischief."

He spoke to his men in Hindoostanee, and they moved forward to the gate, where a party of twenty, who carried carbines, got off and followed the officer and Austin into the palace, where they found the prince in all his glory, pacing up and down the piazza like a tiger in a cage, with a crowd of servants in white buddled in a group below, listening to something he was saying.

The English officer stalked forward, his steel scabbard rattling on the marble flags, and called out in an imperious tone to the Hindoos:

"Get out, you black dogs! Go to your places."

Instantly there was a scatterment, and the timid Hindoos were running away, when the rajah shrieked out some orders in Hindoostanee that caused them to halt and waver.

The officer stamped his foot.

"Did you hear me? Go!"

Again a wavering pause, and the officer made a rapid signal to his men.

"Click-click-click-click-click!"

The grim Sikh troopers cocked their carbines as coolly as if about to fire at a target, and the sound decided the waverers.

There was a universal scream of terror, and away went the cowardly Bengalees like a flock of sheep round the house, leaving the prince all alone on his porch, glaring and panting.

Then the officer put up the still smoking pistol with which he had scattered Punjasa's private troopers, and advanced to the steps of the piazza.

"Sir, I warn you to keep back," cried the frate Hindoo, who seemed to have worked himself into a frenzy. "I am Punjasa Roy, the rightful Rajah of Chooala—"

The other, paying not the slightest attention to his vaporing, walked on, came up close behind him, and laid his hand heavily on the prince's shoulder.

"I arrest you in the name of the queen," he said, sternly, "and if you give me any more of your impudence I'll take you to Calcutta in irons, and you shall be sent to work on the roads."

Austin, who had been a witness to the undoubted nerve of the prince among the tigers, expected to see him offer some resistance; but, to his surprise, the latterly defiant and independent Hindoo quieted down in a moment, and only asked in a sort of complaining tone:

"Why arrest me? What have I done, Cornet Ludlow?"

"That's not for me to say," coolly retorted Ludlow. "It's the Governor's order, and I, as his aide, have come to see it executed. You've been smashing up things with that drag of yours, I hear."

"No, no, on my soul, no—I did not drive—it was a cursed Yankee bungler that came and asked me for a chance. It was all a mistake. He ought to be arrested—not me."

Austin, thoroughly disgusted by his sudden and pusillanimous conduct, broke out:

"You lie, and you know it. You insisted on my friend driving, and asked him to smash a lamp-post in front of the Government House. Where is he now, you scoundrel?"

The pale, languid young cornet of the night reception had turned into a grim young man with a fighting chin, as he observed:

"I thought as much. So you've been plotting again, have you? Here, havildar!"

He beckoned to a black-bearded sergeant, who came forward, jingling a pair of handcuffs; and in another second the haughty prince, who had boasted that he "knew no fear," was standing trembling on the piazza, while the grim Sikh snapped the handcuffs on his wrists, and Ludlow observed:

"You've been playing your pranks long enough and the Governor is going to put a stop to it, my interesting friend. Now, mark my words, don't you try to arouse the people on your way to Calcutta, or the havildar will shoot you. Take him out, havildar, with two file of men. I'm going through this den of wickedness. I hope you will honor me with your company, sir."

He spoke to Austin, who was too much amazed at the whole transaction to offer a remark, till the humiliated prince had been taken away, when he asked Ludlow:

"What is the matter? Why did you arrest him?"

"Oh, just to frighten the blackguard," returned Ludlow, carelessly. "You see the Government pays out a good deal of money on these native princes, and lets them have all the fun they want unless they trench on our province. This chap used to be as quiet as a lamb as long as he was kept amused, but lately he's got tired—I suppose a fellow does get tired of looking at Nautch girls and tame tigers and all that sort of thing—and he's been taking a fancy to have Americans and Russians at his place, and to make himself conspicuous in Calcutta. So the Governor's going to give him a lesson, and he won't get out till he promises to behave himself. I think they'll cut down his allowance, too. You know we've got to hold onto India, and we can't let these fellows ride over us rough-shod. That would never do, you know."

And this youthful satrap of a vast empire calmly proceeded to the interior of the palace, turning out the servants, who fled like sheep; driving the Nautch girls away, and generally conducting himself with all the airs of a conqueror, till he found Louis Bonnelle, who had been seized by Punjasa's order and hurried away to an inner room, where he was locked up.

"Are there any other white men here?" he then asked Austin.

"Only one, Milo the tamer, an American in the prince's service."

"Then let's give him a chance to go. This black-guard can't keep white men in his service."

CHAPTER XX.

FACE TO FACE.

ANTONIO MORELLI was so much amazed and delighted at the size of the ruby given by Punjasa Roy that he could hardly believe his eyes; and as soon as Nina came down he called out to her in his rapid Italian:

"There, you fool, see what you would have lost with your modest airs, by not coming down when the gracious prince called for you. Now you are sent for this evening, all by yourself, and if you play your cards well you can get a regular fortune out of him; for I see he fancies you."

The girl listened in silence, with her lip set in the same disdainful curl.

"I shall not go there," was all she answered.

"Why not, why not?" he asked, angrily.

"You know why. The man is a villain and wishes to buy me as a slave."

"And I say you shall go."

"Then I say I will not."

She faced him as firmly as if she had been a man, and never quailed when he lifted his hand, but continued, between her set teeth:

"Strike me, and I will come down to the foot-lights to-night and tell the people how you treat me. I will break up the show."

His hand sunk slowly down as the bully saw the undaunted spirit of the girl.

"I believe you'd do it," he said, under his breath. She laughed—such a hollow, bitter laugh.

"And why not? I have told you I hate this life. And you—you have no more shame than to want to sell your daughter to this man, who gives you jewels. Your own flesh and blood."

As she stood panting and quivering with holy indignation before him, her bright gold tresses flowing over her slight, boyish-looking figure, something seemed to strike the Italian with irritation, for he hissed out:

"*Maldita diavola!* it is his blood looks out of your eyes."

And then, with all his force, he struck at her with his brawny fist—for Morelli was a strong man, and had been an acrobat in his youth, before he became a manager.

But the girl had been expecting the blow and leaped aside like an antelope, when she ran out on the wire and defied him to come after, a challenge which was not accepted, as Morelli's wrath began to cool.

He turned away with a scowl and growl, and gave orders to take down the wires and gun, and to pack them, ready to take to the prince's palace in the evening.

"Then we'll see if you won't go there," he said to Nina in a threatening manner, and so left the stage, while the girl, trembling all over with the reaction from her passion, tottered to her dressing-room and burst out crying all by herself.

Many were the tears she had shed before, but none more bitter than now. Many a time before had she been compelled to keep on her guard against the designs of others, but never had her father been so open and remorseless in his determination to sell her to the highest bidder; and in her despair Nina made up her mind to run away—no matter where—to escape. She thought of seeking the hotel where she knew the two young Americans lodged, to throw herself on Austin's protection, but something intangible prevented her, and, moreover, she did not know certainly if they were there.

Finally she slipped on her street dress and came out of the theater as the cool of the evening was approaching, resolved to find the American consul, whose duty she had heard was to help all Americans in distress.

When she got outside, the attendants had all gone to supper except the janitor, who gave her a respectful salute; for all the show people adored Nina, and of him she asked where was the consul's office.

He told her, and she walked swiftly away, when, as she turned the corner, she came on a little group of horsemen that riveted her attention.

In the midst, riding beside a black-bearded Sikh sergeant, who carried a drawn revolver, and guarded by four other Sikhs, rode Punjasa Roy, in his jeweled coat, but with downcast eyes and drooping head, while his wrists were handcuffed in front of him.

A very different man was Punjasa Roy, cowed and manacled, from the smiling, selfish debauchee who had called to her to come down. A crowd of awe-stricken natives was hurrying along the sidewalk, keeping pace with the horses, and with them a few English soldiers, out for a stroll, of one of whom she asked:

"What has he done?"

"Blest if I know, miss. Them black beggars is up to some mischief all the time," he answered. "I s'pose the Guv'nor wants to take him down a peg or two; that's all."

Nina looked on with a thankful heart.

"At least I am saved from him," she murmured; and so went on to the little hotel where her family lodged, and found her father at supper.

He scowled at her as she came in.

"Are you ready to go?" he asked.

"Yes, I am now," she answered; "but you may save your journey. The prince has been arrested, and has just passed here under guard. I saw him myself."

Morelli jumped up with an oath.

"It's a lie; you are deceiving me."

"Very well," she said; "then you can go there to find out, if you choose. I am ready."

He believed what he said about her deceiving him, and as soon as supper was over put her into a carriage and took her off to the palace which he knew to be Punjasa's.

They arrived there at sunset, and found the palace dark and silent.

The showman raised the English knocker on the door, and as the noise of the blows echoed through the house, began to Nina:

"Well, you were perhaps right in his going away, but you are such a liar I never can believe you. Here comes some one."

As he spoke the door opened, and a small man, neatly attired in black, came out and asked in English:

"What does the gentleman wish?"

Morelli was standing with his back to the sunset and his face to the stranger, whose face was plainly visible, while his own was in shadow.

Instead of answering him, Morelli suddenly drew back, stooping his head, then turned and hurried away to the carriage, where he cried excitedly to the driver:

"Home, home! He is not there. Quick, I say!"

Nina, who was sunk back in a corner of the carriage, saw him take a pistol out of his hip-pocket and look carefully at the charges, with many furtive glances out of the window.

Then she heard a step, and saw a swarthy face peering into the carriage out of a pair of wild-looking blue eyes.

Morelli nervously cocked his pistol, and asked, with a trembling voice:

"What do you want? I do not know you."

The wild blue eyes roamed round the carriage as if not seeing him, and then Milo, the tamer, said:

"You are the man that asked for the prince, and you have the cannon and the girl. Where is she?"

Morelli, with trembling lips, faltered:

"She is here in the carriage."

Milo looked into the dark corner and said in a low, quiet voice:

"Do not fear me now. I will not hurt you. Lightning never blasts a tree twice. Let me see your face."

Something in his tone made Nina lean forward to look at him, and the swarthy face turned pale as the tamer looked at the girl.

Then—how it came about was hard to tell—Morelli's pistol went off, and the horses took fright and ran away at full speed, while Milo Romer fell prone in the road and lay still.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE TRACK OF A BULLET.

ALBERT AUSTIN went back to Calcutta after his interview with Cornet Ludlow, a wiser man. They had seen Milo the Tamer, who had developed an unexpectedly reasonable manner before the English officer, but had positively refused to leave the prince's service.

"He has been a good chief to me," he said, "and these black thieves will steal all he has, now he is arrested, unless I stay to keep order. They are all afraid of me."

And Cornet Ludlow, with a shrug, told him to take his own way.

Then the cornet, with all the lordly indifference of an Englishman in India, ordered out two of the captive prince's horses for the Americans, and accompanied them back to Calcutta, where he took leave of them, saying:

"Use the beasts as long as you please, and don't mind. That blackguard will never miss them."

The first place to which Austin rode was the little hotel at which the Morellis lodged, and his first question was for Nina.

When he heard from madame that she had gone off with her father to the palace to give a cannon exhibition before the prince, he was completely unmanned for a moment.

"With him there it would be bad," he groaned; "but that mad Romer will surely kill her now. Come along, Louis. We may be in time to save her yet. Are you armed?"

Louis nodded, and the young men went out of the hotel, mounted their borrowed steeds and galloped away at full speed to the palace, which they reached in the first light of the full moon, while the western sky was still red with the last beams of sunset.

Up and down in front of the palace the road was silent and deserted; and no light could be seen from the windows of the long and rich facade of the building.

"No one has been here yet," said Louis, pulling up his horse. "There would be some noise about the place."

"Let's ride on a little," replied Austin, in an anxious tone. "Some one may be—must be about."

They rode on to the end of the white wall that bounded the prince's park, without meeting a soul, and then turned back.

"I'm going in to see. Get your pistols ready," said Austin, firmly; and then they galloped back to the carriage gate, which they found wide-open, and were just galloping in when both horses shied violently away from something on the ground, and Austin beheld a man lying on his face in the road.

In a moment he had thrown his bridle to Louis and sprung off, crying hurriedly:

"It's Morelli or Romer, killed. I thought it would be so."

He ran to the prostrate figure and turned it over, lifting up the head as he did so, when the features of the tiger-tamer confronted him, the eyes set in a glassy stare, the mouth half-open. As he turned him over a little streak of blood trickled down the other's forehead, and Austin found the top of his head all wet with blood through the dark wig he wore.

Twitching it off, he beheld the great seam of which honest Captain Stubbs had told him on the top of the other's head, and plowing it up was a deep furrow, evidently the track of a bullet at close quarters, for it bled but little, and was blackened with powdered smoke.

But the man was by no means dead, though he was entirely insensible, and presently he moaned deeply and stirred.

Austin turned to Louis and began to think aloud to his friend, as it were.

"I think Nina must be safe."

"I hope so, but why?"

"Because this fellow's hit hard."

"Well, that doesn't prove her safe."

"But if we had found Morelli here, it would have been to my mind proof that Romer had killed him and carried off the daughter."

"Possibly."

"And Romer being here, as good as killed, it is also proof probable that Morelli killed him."

"Then where's Morelli?"

"In this house probably. We must go in, or we may not find Nina quite so safe."

"But we can't leave this poor devil all alone to die, Austin. Is he quite dead?"

"No, only stunned. The bullet has taken a course right across the old scar, where the lion ripped his scalp off."

"Then he ought to have a doctor."

"Will you go for one?"

"I will, if you will stay by him."

Just at this moment the wounded man groaned deeply and muttered:

"Alice! Alice! Her eyes."

Austin spoke to him encouragingly:

"How do you feel, Milo? Try to sit up, man."

But the tamer only groaned and muttered again, relapsing into insensibility, and the artist could see that there was no hope at the time of rousing him.

Louis got off and tied the horses and they carried the wounded man to the piazza, where they found the door of the palace wide open, the interior being as far as they could see entirely solitary and deserted.

The grand saloon with all its wealth of ornament was untenanted, and they carried Milo in and laid him on one of the couches, after which Louis rode away to the city as hard as he could go, leaving Austin alone in the palace with the insensible tamer.

It was a long and weary vigil for the young man, and he had begun to wonder what had become of all the servants, when he heard a vehicle driving past on the road outside, toward Calcutta.

Running out, he was just in time to see a carriage go by at full speed, followed by a wagon which he recognized as one of Morelli's show vehicles, and he hailed it in a loud tone.

The only effect of his hail was to increase the speed of the vehicle, for he heard the voice of Morelli screaming excitedly:

"Faster! faster! or the devils will catch us yet!"

As the wagon and carriage vanished in a cloud of dust, he returned to the palace, convinced that Morelli must have been badly frightened at something, and resumed his watch over the insensible man, till the clatter of hoofs and jingle of scabbards told him that a party of soldiers was coming to the house, when he went out again and recognized Louis, with Cornet Ludlow accompanied by another officer, who proved to be a doctor in the Government service.

The medico ordered the Sikh troopers to light the candles in the saloon and Cornet Ludlow explained his presence by saying:

"The Governor thought best to send up a guard here, when he heard the servants had all run away, for fear the palace might be cleaned out and we be held responsible. I don't see what can have frightened them so much, but these Hindoos are queer fellows."

Then he ordered a sergeant with a squad of men to search the grounds and find if any of the people were about, while he came to the doctor and asked:

"Well, doctor, is the man badly hurt?"

The surgeon, who had been examining the tamer closely, looked up with an expression of great pleasure.

"My dear fellow, it's one of the most singular and interesting cases I ever heard of or saw. If I can do what I hope to do to this man, it will be a case to put in the 'Lancet' and attract medical attention all over the civilized world. It's beautiful."

"Well, well. I'm glad I brought you. Is it a dangerous wound? Where is it?"

"It's hardly a wound at all. But that's not the point. Send out and see if the ambulance is all ready. I must have the man in hospital to do him justice."

When Ludlow had gone out, Doctor Gambier turned to Austin and asked him:

"Have you ever known this man before?"

"I have met him several times within a year or two past. Why do you ask?"

"Do you know anything about him, his history, his habits, his profession?"

"He has been a wild-beast tamer."

"Ha! that explains it, that explains it," said the young surgeon, thoughtfully. "I was puzzling my head to imagine how in the deuce he got that very singular shaped seam on the top of his head. It must have been from a tiger's claws."

"No, a lion's, in Melbourne, Australia, twenty years ago, doctor."

"Twenty years ago! Then he must have been as mad as a March hare ever since, I'll swear, with such a complication as some bungler put him into."

"He has been mad at times, and yet at other times quite reasonable, to all seeming."

"And no wonder. The fellow that sewed up that gash must have been an ignoramus, for he entirely overlooked the fact that there was a fracture of the skull besides—a minute one—that left a splinter of bone impinging on the brain. Twenty years ago, you say? Why, it's a wonder the man wasn't dead long ago. He must have had the constitution of a horse."

"And how will this wound affect him?"

The surgeon became professionally grave and recalcitrant at once.

"I could not give an opinion. It is a singular wound and has exposed the old injury. I can tell better after an operation. If it succeeds, the man may become as sensible as any of us. But, on the other hand, he may die under it, or before it is accomplished."

CHAPTER XXII. IN THE WARD.

THE cool sea breeze was blowing through the clean white ward of the English hospital at Calcutta, a day later, when Albert Austin, seated by the bedside of one of the patients, saw Louis Bonnelle coming down between the rows of beds, and rose hastily, with his finger on his lip as a sign for caution, while he went to meet his friend.

"Well," he whispered, "what have you found out? The poor fellow's asleep."

"I found that Morelli has thrown up his whole engagement here, and that he slipped off last night on the Seringapatam, one of the Mail Company's steamers, bound for Hong Kong, via Singapore and Yokohama."

"Did he take his people?"

"Everything, bag and baggage. The hotel people say that he seemed to be thoroughly demoralized, frightened out of his wits."

"Then that settles the point. He must have met Romer, and, having shot him, thinks himself liable to be arrested for murder."

"Unless, indeed, he fears still that Romer will pursue him, as he threatened."

"I doubt if he will now. The doctor says he will probably wake up reasonable, and remember nothing of what has transpired during his period of mania. It's a very strange case."

"Tell me about it, Austin. I've been so busy hunting the Morellis that I heard nothing of what you did this morning."

"Well, as soon as the light got strong, we had a regular gathering of sawbones here; for it seems Gambier had told them of the interesting case, and every one wanted a hack at it. And then there was a long contest of etiquette as to who should do this, that and the other, while poor Romer lay snoring like a man with apoplexy. They all agreed that a small splinter of bone in an old injury had grown into the brain so as to exercise a slight but constant pressure, aggravated whenever excitement sent the blood to the head. And the bullet had given this splinter a further set in, so as to produce complete insensibility. At last an old fellow they called Guthrie, the Medical Director of the province, settled the question of precedence and did the work himself, while Gambier gave him the instruments; another fellow had the ether sponge, and two or three more held towels and basins or looked on. It was a regular pow-wow, and the doctors were happy. Old Guthrie took out the splinter with a thing like a corkscrew, and the moment it was away Romer stopped snoring and snorting, and he's been sleeping like a baby ever since."

"And how comes it you are watching by him?"

"They gave me the privilege as a favor, and I'm to ring for a doctor the moment he wakes, and not to excite him."

"Well, I wonder what he'll say."

"I'm curious to know. Now you'd better go to the hotel, and wait for me."

"All right. And I say, old fellow, I'm going home again. I begin to think I've been fooled long enough by that girl. She don't care for me, and she never will."

"A sensible conclusion," said Austin, shortly; and then he returned to the bedside of the patient while Louis Bonnelle strolled away.

The young artist presently noticed that the sleeper was becoming uneasy, and finally Milo Romer opened his eyes and looked up at the American by his side with a glance of some wonder, and spoke in a quiet voice:

"Where's Mr. Bailey?"

"You must not talk," returned Austin, gently.

"You've been hurt, and this is the hospital. I must ring for the doctor."

He went to the bell, and when he came back found Romer staring at him wistfully.

"Did old Brutus get out?" he asked.

"Old Brutus?" repeated Austin, puzzled, and forgetting the doctor's caution. "Who's he?"

"My lion. Oh, you don't know. I suppose you're the hospital steward. Who brought me here? Did he smash me up much?"

Then Austin realized that Romer's mind had gone back to the moment in the cage, twenty years before, when the lion struck him down.

"You must keep quiet now," he said. "The doctor said you must not talk. Here he comes."

In fact at that moment Doctor Gambier came hurrying in to the bedside, and observed:

"All right, Mr. Austin; he'll do now. Well, my man, and how do you find yourself to-day? Feel hungry? Like some chicken-broth?"

Milo Romer smiled cheerfully.

"Pretty well, doctor. Are any of my bones broken? I don't feel any pain; only my head's a little dizzy. What's this?"

He put up his hand to the bandage on his head and went on:

"Did Brutus bite me after he knocked me down? Where's Mr. Bailey? Is the show here yet?"

"Oh, the show's all right," said Gambier, in a cheerful way. "Don't worry about that. Do you feel hungry?"

"Well, yes."

"Then you must have dinner at once. Don't say a word till you've eaten, or I shall have to scold you."

The tamer lay quietly looking on while the doctor bustled about, and the latter beckoned Austin away, to whisper:

"Keep him talking about his bodily wants so that his mind won't work till he gets a little stronger. He's all right now, if we can keep off brain fever. Try to turn his questions in any way to get him to eat and sleep."

Austin nodded and went back to the bedside, where a Hindoo nurse had already taken his seat with a bowl of chicken-broth, with which he was feeding the patient.

Milo laughed as he saw the artist.

"That nigger thinks I can't eat. Let me sit up. I'm well enough."

The watchful doctor nodded, and the tamer sat up and drank all the broth eagerly, when he asked for meat, ate heartily and then observed:

"Now I feel sleepy. Tell Mr. Bailey I'll be ready to do my act again in a week, and I'll take that Brutus down in a hurry."

Then he was as good as his word, and was soon slumbering peacefully.

The doctor came and looked at him with much interest, remarking, in a low tone:

"The man's going to live and recover his mind. In fact, he's quite sensible now. Do you know anything of his past history?"

Austin told him what he had gathered, and the doctor observed:

"It will be dangerous to tell him all at once. He knows nothing of the death of his wife and child—that's pretty certain, or he would have spoken of it—and so far it is all right. But you say he knew his wife had run away with this Morelli, before the lion struck him down. When that comes back to him, it will be troublesome to prevent him going after them again. He ought to have a friend with him to keep him out of mischief for the next six months."

Austin, who had been sitting in a brown study by the bedside, looked up here.

"I will stay with him myself, doctor," he said. "I owe him my life when he was mad, and I feel I ought to help him, now he is sane, to recover his peace of mind."

The doctor shook hands with him, warmly.

"Sir, you are a good friend. When he wakes you can satisfy his curiosity, if you avoid irritating topics."

He went away, and Austin remained by the bedside of the wounded tamer till sunset, when Romer awoke, rubbed his eyes and said, in a wondering way:

"What sort of a place is this? Where is it?"

"It is the Government Hospital," answered the artist, quietly.

"Yes, yes, I remember; you told me. By the by, what's your name?"

"Austin."

"Austin, Austin? You look like a pretty good fellow. As soon as I get up you shall have all the tickets you want to our show. Has Mr. Bailey been here?"

"No, not to-day."

"Ah! the show must be doing well. I suppose he's too busy. Where's the Coz. Com.?"

"The Coz. Com.? what's that?" asked Austin, forgetting his story.

"The other show. That Italian scoundrel's. By the by, do you know he's been trying to coax me into his company all the way from the East? But he can't do it. Mr. Bailey's treated me well, and I never go back on my word. We'll break that fellow up before—Hullo! where? why?"

He began to look around him as if searching for something.

"Where are my clothes?"

"On that chair."

"No, no, not those, my ring dress, the trunks. I had a letter—a—where are they?"

He spoke anxiously and irritably, and rose up in the bed; but Austin soothed him.

"They were all torn and bloody. We threw them away. Don't worry about them. You can get a new suit when you're up."

"That's not it," snapped the other. "There was a letter—what was it? I can't remember—it was something about Rosy—where—where has it gone to?"

Austin, at a loss what to do, said:

"Never mind. No one saw it. The lion had it in the cage, all over blood."

The words seemed to rouse some recollection in the wounded man, for he began to feel in his bosom, and presently drew out a little bag at the end of a cord round his neck.

"I knew it was there," he said, wistfully.

CHAPTER XXIII. THE DAWN OF REASON.

AUSTIN watched the invalid with a feeling of mingled curiosity and anxiety, as he pulled out the bag he had hidden so long.

He opened it slowly and drew out a small folded paper, yellow with age and covered with dark-brown stains like blood. It was all ragged at the edges and falling to pieces where it had been folded.

The wounded tamer looked at it in a singular, dazed way, and murmured:

"What makes it so old? Have I been sick so long? Let me see."

He mused a little and turned to Austin.

"What's the day of the month?"

"Seventeenth of July," answered Austin.

"July, July? What makes it so hot in this country? I thought the Australian seasons were turned round."

Austin, seeing that discovery was inevitable, now boldly made an invention.

"You are not in Australia. You've been taken to Calcutta. This is India."

"Ah! then I must have been down a long time. I had a friend once here, the Rajah Punjasa Roy, a pretty spoiled boy. I used to tame his beasts for him. I wonder if he's alive and well? I must see him."

"You shall," answered the artist, soothingly.

"And the show—is that here too?"

"No. They had to leave here."

"Of course. I couldn't expect anything else. They couldn't do without a tamer. Do you know whom they've got?"

"I don't exactly."

"Probably Jack Thorne; he was a good man, only he married a—"

Here he stopped, looked round, and slowly asked:

"Hasn't my wife been to see me yet?"

Austin could not answer him. He knew not what to say, and presently Milo took up the faded and ragged paper and held it out to him, saying wistfully:

"I don't seem to be able to read this clearly, Austin. Will you read it for me?"

The artist took the paper, and, much to his joy, was able to decipher only a few words, so he returned it with the remark:

"It is almost illegible from age and the blood-stains over it."

"Couldn't you make out any words?" asked the other, anxiously. "Please try. I can't remember, but it seems to me that's a letter from my wife about something. Please read it."

Thus urged, Austin read:

"M . . . [three lines blotted out] when you read . . . away with Mor . . . prove . . . gentleman . . . love . . . so jealous as you . . . after me . . . never . . . back to you. He loves . . . Alice shall . . . father . . . Ros . . ."

Milo Romer listened intently as he spelled out this fragmentary note, and Austin saw the sweat pouring off his forehead. When the artist had finished, the tamer said in a dazed, dreamy sort of way:

"I remember it all. Take a pen and write."

Austin wonderingly took out a pencil, and the wounded man, in slow, measured sentences, dictated as follows:

"Milo Romer, I have left you forever, and will never live with you again. If I can teach the child to hate you, I will. When you read this letter, you will know I have run away with Morelli, whose conduct has proved him to me to be a perfect gentleman. He has given me his promise always to love me. He is not so jealous as you are, and I love him better than you. It is no use coming after me; for I will never, never, never, so help me Heaven, come back to you! He loves me, and he will take care of both of us, and Alice shall never know that he is anything but her real father."

ROSALIND—

"Not Romer any more."

When he had finished, Milo Romer fell back on the bed as if exhausted, with a moan of "My head, my head," and Austin was about to ring for the doctor, when the other slowly said:

"No, no; I'll be better in a minute. It seems to hurt me to think. Did I say anything just now?"

"You dictated me a letter."

"Yes, yes. I forget it all now, but I must have given it to you right. Keep it till I'm well. I want to see it then. Now I'm tired." And in a very few moments he was again buried in a deep slumber.

Thus things went on for several days; the wounded man gradually gained strength and reason, but still entirely oblivious of the interval between his Melbourne trials of twenty years past and his present condition in the hospital at Calcutta.

Every time he tried to recall the past he was compelled to desist and fall back with a pain in his head, till Austin tried to engage his interest on things present, after which he improved rapidly.

He seemed to have lost none of his strength of muscle, though the power of balance was temporarily suspended; for he would totter like a drunken man when he tried to walk, and yet would absently bend a bar of iron over his knee and straighten it out again, when he was trying to think.

When the doctor came to examine his head, the patient would ask questions how it had happened, always thinking of the lion's claws, and wonder how it was Brutus had not bitten him elsewhere, or broken his arm or leg.

One day he made a discovery which he told to the doctor in a serious manner.

"Doctor, my arm was broken. I can feel the lump where the bone knit."

The doctor knew this, and was prepared, so he answered:

"Yes, that healed rapidly; but your head wound was more obstinate. You were out of your senses quite a long time."

The convalescent looked at him steadily.

"How long a time is the longest a man has ever been known to be out of his senses?"

"Oh, sometimes for years," said Gambier, carelessly.

"Then I must have been so, for I'm getting gray."

The doctor and Austin both stared and looked more earnestly at him. His light tawny hair had prevented their noticing it before, but it was a fact

that it was thickly sprinkled with gray, and that only since his entrance into the hospital.

He said no more that day on the subject, but next morning he surprised Austin by asking:

"Mr. Austin, what year is this?"

"Oh, nonsense," returned the artist, confused; "you ought to know that."

"Is it 1879?"

"Why do you ask?"

"Because I saw a copy of the *Calcutta Englishman*, and it read July 23, 1879."

Austin could make no answer, and the other continued:

"Then I have slept nearly as long as Rip Van Winkle, for I remember the day the show opened in Melbourne. It was Christmas Day, 1865."

Then he lay back on his pillow awhile, and finally said to himself:

"And Alice is seventeen. She was three when we reached Melbourne. And who knows—?"

He said no more for some time, Austin watching him keenly, till at last he turned to the artist, and asked him directly:

"Did you ever know a man called Antonio Morelli, a showman?"

"I did—in fact, I do now," was the reply, as the artist watched him still more keenly.

"Where is he now?"

"At Yokohama."

"Yes, I know. I've been there. I've been nearly everywhere. Well, I must go there."

"Why? What do you want there?"

"To find Morelli."

"What for? He's nothing to you."

"He must know something about Alice."

"Alice whom?"

"Alice Romer, my child. Her mother was my wife, and I drove her from me by my jealousy; but he has no right to keep my child. I must find her if she be alive."

"And if not?" asked Austin, gravely.

"If not—there is no if not—my child is alive. Rosy was a flirt; but she was not a bad mother. She would not take the child on the wire, though Bailey wanted her to do so, several times. And even Morelli could not ill-treat that pretty baby, with her blue eyes and sunny hair."

"But suppose you found her dead?" persisted Austin, seriously. "Such things have happened."

"Then I should find out how she died, and if Morelli has ill-treated her, I will kill him."

His tone was quiet and serene, and after that he seemed to improve every hour. His balance returned to him, and he insisted on taking his clothes and going from the hospital the very next day.

"If Punjasa Roy be alive," he said to Austin, "he will give me money to follow my child. He was a spoiled boy, but he always loved me, and he has all the money he wants. I must find Alice, be she at Yokohama or the other end of the world."

CHAPTER XXIV.

YOKOHAMA.

THE harbor of Yokohama was full of craft of all nations, and presented a scene of extreme animation as the Bengal and Malayan Steam Navigation Company's ship *Nizam* glided in at half-speed and came to anchor opposite the custom-house.

There were more than a dozen ships-of-war of England, France and Russia, several of them cruising ironclads, swinging to the tide, and a solitary frigate, bearing the stars and stripes, represented the United States in a rather shabby manner, compared to the foreign squadrons.

The whole length of the shore was lined with quaint Chinese and Japanese junks, while shoals of small boats and sampans* shot to and fro over the smooth waters of the harbor, rowed by stalwart, half-naked men, who had their hair bunched on the top of their heads under enormous palm-leaf hats. Sailing pleasure-boats, with red and white striped sails and gay-colored awnings, skimmed past the men-of-war, loaded with parties of Japanese ladies and gentlemen, who all wore robes of about the same shape and were hard to tell apart.

The ladies had quantities of hair-pins in their black hair, and the gentlemen had two swords apiece stuck into their sashes, and that was the easiest way to distinguish them.

The town covered the whole side of a semicircle of hills inclosing the bay, and showed all the colors of the rainbow in its light edifices of bamboo and paper, while the broad streets were full of people and beasts of burden with a few vehicles.

Chinese sedan-chairs and the native *ginrickshaw*—a sort of huge perambulator, big enough to hold an adult passenger and drawn by a stout coolie—were rushing to and fro, most of the luxurious riders being foreigners, and Albert Austin, who had been watching them through a glass, said to the man who stood beside him on the deck of the *Nizam*:

"After all, traveling is very pleasant. It seems as if the variety of this world were never to be exhausted."

His companion was a short wiry person, with close-cut gray hair and sunburnt face. He was dressed in a plain gray suit, and no one would have recognized in his serious face and quiet manners the once wild, erratic Romer, the mad tamer.

"It's a long time since I was here," he answered. "The Japs had only just begun to admit foreigners then, but they seem to have opened the doors wide

enough now. I see they have telegraphs all over the place."

In truth, they could see the familiar lines of poles radiating out from the city into the picturesque country in all directions.

"And now we are here I suppose it will be easy enough to find the show," said Austin. "European shows are not so common."

"They pay well enough," remarked Milo. "At all events circuses do, for these folks do so little riding that they go wild over a bareback act. I remember in '57 being out with Mr. Bailey, when we took over ten thousand dollars in three days, with hardly an American in the show. But if we go ashore we'll soon find out."

"Do any of the people talk English?"

"They didn't in my time, and theirs is about the only language I never could pick up in a hurry. But there's always an interpreter to the hotels, and they come to the custom-house after travelers."

"You have traveled a good deal. Were you ever in Natal?" asked Austin, who had hitherto kept silent on the fact of his having met Romer during the tamer's time of clouded reason.

"Oh yes, I spent three years there as a boy of twelve, with my first master, old 'Lion Jim Keeler,' as they called him. We were catching beasts for the shows, and there's where I learned how to trap any beast that runs and how to talk Zulu. It's a curious language, Mr. Austin. Were you ever there?"

"Yes, once, but I couldn't master the language. It was before they took the king prisoner. You knew they had a fight with the English."

"No, I'd not heard it. What about? Old Panda used to be called a friend to the English."

"Old Panda? Who is he?"

"The Zulu king, one of Chaka's sons."

"Oh well, he's dead now. The new king is called Cetywayo."

"*Tut-chwayo*," corrected the other, with a singular click of his tongue on the first syllable.

"He was Panda's younger brother. So he's king now, is he?"

"Was, you mean? He is a prisoner at Cape Town now, I see by the papers."

He watched Romer attentively to see if he had any recollection of the struggle in which he had taken so singular a part, but the tamer's face was perfectly placid.

"I'm sorry for it. Those Zulus are very fine fellows indeed; brave, honest, decent, and they fight like devils."

"They do, indeed. I was nearly killed by them, and was only saved by a white man who had got among them somehow, and who rode a beast I never saw ridden before—a zebra."

"Oh that's nothing," answered Romer, carelessly. "I used to tame zebras easy enough. You know Rarey the horse-tamer did it, and I can do anything he ever did. I learned my trade pretty thoroughly."

"Did you ever succeed in taming the American catamount?" asked Austin, abruptly, determined to probe what he could of the other's loss of memory. "I once met a man in the Adirondacks who had bears, wolves, panthers and deer all tamed, and yet running loose in the woods."

Still no sign of recognition as Romer answered, calmly:

"My father used to do it, and I did as a boy, but I never heard that another man knew the trick. What was he like?"

"A man about your size, with very long light hair. He dressed in tight leather clothes and lived in a cavern with two exits, stretching clear through a mountain."

For the first time Romer's attention seemed to be excited, and he muttered:

"Strange! I thought no one knew of that cave but my father and myself."

"And he had for his only attendant besides the beasts, a dumb dwarf called Zip," pursued the other, watching him.

Milo Romer started violently.

"Zip, Zip! Where, where? where is he? I—it seems to me—did I dream it—I once knew a Zip—where?"

He became very thoughtful, and Austin said no more at the time. He was satisfied that the links of consciousness between the present and the past would require time to reunite, and he had heard that recovered maniacs, after an interval, regain a memory of their hallucinations, as we do of our dreams.

The vessel was now at anchor, and they went over the side, took a sampan to the shore, and were rolled away in smooth riding *ginrickshaws* to the Hotel De l'Amerique, an establishment kept by a French-American, who had married a Russian and had English waiters and a real Yankee barkeeper, so as to please as many customers as possible.

They ordered their baggage sent up, and then inquired about the Morelli show: "Had it been to Yokohama?"

"Yes, and had a very good season. There was a girl who was advertised to be fired out of a cannon, and all the people wanted to see her; but she was sick and they had to do it with a little boy instead. They kept promising the girl to the last day, but she would not act. She would only sing."

"And where are they now?" asked Romer, in a troubled, constrained manner.

"Gone to Melbourne with a troupe of our best jugglers and a number of Zulus," was the reply.

"Zulus!" echoed Austin; "why, where did they get them from, I wonder?"

"They came from Cape Town, I believe. A man called Barnes brought them; but they did not take here. We have so many curious sights, and they

were only common savages. One of them was deaf and dumb, or anyhow he only talked by signs. They said he was not a real Zulu, and Barnes called him Zip."

"Zip!" cried Romer, starting up from his seat in uncontrollable agitation. "Why do you persist in tormenting me? I do not know Zip. He is—where is he?"

The landlord stared, winked at Austin and tapped his forehead significantly, as the tamer sunk back in his chair again and hid his face in his hands.

As for Austin, he began to put things together in his own mind and to reason out the connection between them.

Zip had been with Romer in the Adirondacks and South Africa; but he had come no further. He must therefore have been abandoned by the other in some unusually severe fit of mania, in a manner which he had felt to be unworthy and ungenerous, and now his reason was struggling back through the mists at the sound of that name, with a vague idea of something painful. Austin said nothing about it, but he watched him closely, and observed:

"Did Morelli take Zip and the Zulus with him?"

"Yes, sir. They were left here without money, and he must have got them cheap. They will do very well in Australia, I think."

CHAPTER XXV.

ALBERT AUSTIN made it a point never to lose sight of Milo Romer after his recovery from the injury at Calcutta, and had had but little trouble with him.

He had kept him from going to Punjasa Roy's palace by telling him several stories, more or less true, about the rajah's being in prison, sick and dead; and finally had offered to take him on to Yokohama himself, paying his expenses, a matter he was able to accomplish by means of the first loan he had ever asked from his careless millionaire friend, Bonnelle.

Louis had left him in Calcutta, promising to go home by Bombay and Suez; and the artist thought he had seen the last of him, much to his own satisfaction, for he began to feel all the jealousy of a man in love toward a rich rival.

What was his surprise therefore, that evening, while he and Romer were strolling down the streets of Yokohama, looking at the quaint picture before them, to be hailed in a loud voice from a *ginrickshaw*, from which presently leaped Louis Bonnelle, hale and hearty, but dressed in black, who wrung his hand hard and cried:

"Austin, old boy, I'll never leave you again. I was a fool to do it, and I've had bad luck ever since. I'm glad I've found you."

"Why, what's happened?" asked Austin, while Milo Romer looked amazedly at the young man as if he had been a perfect stranger.

"The matter is—look here."

He pulled out of his pocket a black-bordered letter, postmarked from New York.

"I got it in Suez. My father died while we were in Natal, and I'm my own master. I'm going to find Nina, ask her if she'll have me, and by Jove, if she will, I'll marry her."

Austin was so much amazed that he could only stare and repeat:

"Marry Nina! You!"

"And why not?" asked Louis, testily. "I can marry any one I please, can't I? You can't preach to me as you used to do when my father was alive. I've all the money I want and nothing to do but enjoy myself. If I want to marry Nina, what have you got to say about it?"

"Nothing of course," returned Austin, stiffly.

"As you say, you have a right."

And his heart began to sink within him as he thought of his own disadvantage in rivalry.

"Yes, you knew her first," he added, in a tone of involuntary regret.

"Knew her first? I should say I did. Why, I've adored that girl from the first moment I ever saw her—"

"Walk a wire," interjected Austin, bitterly, for he felt unreasonably angry and wanted to hurt Louis's feelings.

Louis drew back and looked amazed.

"I thought you were above taunting a poor girl with a career into which she was forced by a brute of a father, and which she has kept as pure as an angel's path."

Austin felt ashamed.

"I didn't mean it; but you know I'm in the habit of joking. I can't help it."

"Well, please don't joke about the lady I am going to marry," returned Louis, sharply.

Then, after a pause, he went on more mildly:

"What are you doing here, and who is your friend? Suppose you introduce me?"

He evidently did not recognize Romer, so much was the tamer changed in his looks.

Austin introduced him to the other, and Louis could hardly avoid a cry of surprise.

As for Romer, he gazed at the young man in a wistful manner, as if struggling to recall something, and said:

"Your face seems familiar; so is your voice. Where have I seen you?"

Austin frowned and shook his head at his friend; but it was no use.

"Where have you seen me? Why, don't you remember how you got us out of the Zulu scrape, Mr. Romer? I'd have been riddled, if you hadn't been there."

Milo stared at him, bewildered, and turning to Austin, earnestly inquired:

"Did you see me in Zululand, or did I only dream I was there, chasing Morelli?"

"It's hard to tell what are dreams, sometimes," was the evasive reply of the artist.

*The sampan is a small boat nearly wedge shaped and peculiar to the waters of the East Indies, China and Japan, wherever the Chinese have penetrated. It has a pair of eyes painted on its bow, like the junks, for, as John says: "If boat no hab eyes, how can see?"

"It seems to me—and yet I hardly know why—as if I had been there in my sleep. Tell me, did you ever see me before I was in the ward at Calcutta?"

Austin hesitated, but Louis Bonnelle answered with unsuspicious freedom:

"Of course we did. We picked you up at the gate of Punjasa Roy, with a bullet-wound on the top of your head—"

"A bullet-wound!" echoed Romer, with a violent start. "Who shot me?"

"Never mind," interrupted Austin, seizing his arm and turning him round. "We've no time to talk of that now. Come back to the hotel."

With perfect docility the tamer obeyed, and walked along, buried in thought, till they were in their large airy room, when Louis said to his friend Austin, with a boldness he had never shown before:

"I don't see what's the use of beating round the bush any longer about this man. Why not tell him the truth at once? He's strong enough to stand it all now, and you can't go on deceiving him forever."

Romer heard the words, and stood up between the two, with a singular pleading, puzzled look on his face. He clasped his hands.

"I beseech you two gentlemen to hide nothing from me. I begin to see that I must have been out of my mind. Tell me what you know about me, and help me to remember; for I begin to think—God help me—that if I do not know all soon, I shall lose my wits again. You two seem to be educated gentlemen, and I'm only a poor fellow who has picked up his knowledge knocking round the world. Don't be hard on me, but tell me all you know, for God's sake."

Thus urged, Austin spoke gravely:

"Will you listen quietly and promise not to get excited if I tell you what I know?"

"Yes, yes," was the eager reply. "Only hide nothing from me."

"Did you ever know a sea captain called Stubbs, an Englishman?"

"Yes, of course. He brought our show from Frisco to Melbourne. What of him?"

"He told me all your story that I know. Tell me what you remember of the time your lion Brutus struck you down."

A spasm of pain crossed Milo's face.

"I remember it all as if it happened to-day. I had been busy landing my beasts and setting up the cages, and had not had time to attend to my wife and child. Just as the show opened I went to my room to dress, and remembered to ask for them. No one had seen them. I was not uneasy, though. I had no cause to suspect harm. Rosy had often quarreled with me, but I knew she loved me dearly, as I did her, and we both idolized Alice. So I dressed for my act and went out, when some one handed me a letter, and I saw it was in her writing. Then I first began to suspect all was not right. I opened it. It seems to me that I can read that letter now on the walls of this room in letters of fire. It was in these words: 'Milo Romer, I have left you forever, and will never live with you again. If I can teach the children to hate you I will. When you read this letter you will know I have run away with Morelli, whose conduct has proved him to be a perfect gentleman. He has given me his promise always to love me. He is not so jealous as you are, and I love him better than you. It is no use coming after me, for I will never, never, never, so help me Heaven, come back to you. He loves me and he will take care of both of us, and Alice shall never know that he is anything but her real father.'

"ROSALIND—Not Romer any more."

He paused, and the sweat rolled down his face. He wiped it away, and went on huskily:

"That was a nice letter for a man to get when he was just going to face lions and tigers. Well, I did it, though, and I was thrashing Brutus when I heard Morelli himself—I knew the voice—call out to me: 'Poltrone, la tua moglie e perduta.' Do you know what that means? 'Coward, your wife is lost.' It took off my attention for one moment, and the next I remember I was down and Brutus on top of me crunching my arm. That's all I remember till I saw you, Mr. Austin. Now tell me what happened after."

Austin took him by the hand, and said, warmly:

"You are a brave man to say that so calmly. I will tell you all. The lion maimed you badly, tore your scalp half off, and you were taken up senseless. When you recovered the Bailey show had been broken up and you had lost your mind. Captain Stubbs says he next saw you at Honolulu where you had got in some manner unknown, and where you let out all the beasts in Morelli's show in a fit of mania. After that you were shut up in the San Francisco lunatic asylum, where he heard that you died. That is all we know of you till my friend here and I found you out in the Adirondacks only a year ago living in the cave I spoke of and accompanied by a dumb dwarf called Zip, apparently a negro. We saw you again in Zululand with the same boy, but he was not with you when we again met you at Punjasa Roy's palace, where you acted as tamer to the tigers."

"And who shot me?" asked Romer, wistfully.

"I do not know, but I suspect it was Morelli."

"Thank you," was the answer of the tamer.

"Please let me alone a little. I begin to remember."

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE MADMAN'S STORY.

THE two young men gazed with much interest at the troubled countenance of Milo Romer, from whose forehead the sweat rolled profusely. He got up and paced the room nervously, like one of his own beasts, glancing restlessly from side to side and occasionally muttering to himself.

At last he stopped in front of Austin, and asked in a low, husky tone:

"Have you told me all you know? Did I not seem at times to be reasonable?"

Austin had purposely refrained from telling him of the death of his wife and child, thinking he might be spared the memory, but he saw it was no use; so he answered:

"Your wife was killed there by a fall and—and—I fear the child also."

Romer uttered a hollow groan.

"I did not dream it. It is all true. Let me tell you all as if I had dreamed it. I don't know if it's all true; but I remember it all."

"Go on," said Austin, quietly.

"Remember it and be ready to tell me if I ask you. I shall forget it all. I seem to have lost most of my memory at times, but it is clear now—for a little."

He spoke very slowly, in a pitiful, appealing way, so different from his old, fierce, resolute manner that it was infinitely pathetic.

"It seems to me that I woke up in the hospital at Melbourne with the idea that my wife was dead, and that I must visit her grave in America. I remember that I went out into the town and shipped as a sailor in a vessel going to San Francisco. I just remember being at Honolulu and going into Morelli's show with the idea that it was my own, and that I had to perform the beasts. I was standing by the cage of old Brutus—I know he was there, but don't know how he came there."

"Morelli bought him, probably," interjected Austin. "Don't puzzle over it."

He feared Romer would break down under the effort of memory.

"I suppose so. I know I was there when I heard the gun go off, and then came a scream. I ran into the ring and saw my wife and baby lying dead on the sawdust. I remember seeing Morelli standing by them, and I thought he was grinning at me. I think I tried to kill him. Did I?"

"You knocked him senseless with a kick."

"Did I? I forget now. I forget all the rest till I found myself in the woods with a dead baby in my arms. I thought it was my Alice at first, but it had black hair. I remember that well. I thought I had killed it and I was going to bury it. I had no tools, and I was scratching a hole in the ground when I heard some men coming on horseback. I tried to run away with the dead child, but they followed me, and one of them lassoed me—he must have been a Mexican, I think. I remember fighting hard, and then it seems to me I fell asleep. I know that when I woke up I was in a dark padded room, and they told me I was in the California State Lunatic Asylum."

Louis Bonnelle, who had been listening with great intentness, here broke in:

"You say the child had black hair. Are you sure of that?"

The tamer shook his head mournfully.

"I don't know; it may be only a dream."

Austin trod on his friend's foot and said:

"Go on, Romer. How did you get out of the asylum?"

The tamer brightened up.

"I remember that; but I don't know how long I was there. They let me go into the garden, where I came across Zip."

"Zip, the dumb dwarf? Was he mad?"

"They called him an idiot, but I found him as sensible as myself. I was the only patient who treated him kindly, and he loved me like a dog. I must have been sensible then, for I know I helped him to get out, and we both got away."

"But how?"

"One of the patients killed himself, and I found it out and put the body in my room before the attendants knew of it. He was very like me, and Zip and I hid away in a tree in the garden till night came. So they buried the dead man for me, and gave out that the other man and Zip had run away. We heard them talking under the tree. In the night we got away, hid in the woods all day, and traveled at night, till we came to the States, and somehow reached the Adirondacks."

"But how did you do that? You must have crossed the plains among the Indians, and how did you pass through the Mississippi and Ohio States unseen?"

"I don't know. The dream seems faint. I know we were naked, like beasts, and lived on roots which Zip found. He seemed to be able to track them by smell. I remember once being attacked by a big bloodhound—it must have been in the settled States—and Zip and I strangled him and tore him to pieces with our teeth. But I remember nothing clearly till I found we were in my old home in the Adirondacks and back in the cave my father discovered. There I found all his old tools and weapons, and there it seemed to me I forgot everything but my boyhood. Zip and I were quite happy there, till one night—it all seems like a dream—I heard a voice saying the name of Morelli. I must have gone mad then. I remember fighting some one, and then it seems as if I woke up and saw you two gentlemen—was it you I saw?"

"It was," said Austin, gravely.

"And did not some one tell me that Morelli was in South Africa?"

"Neither of us. I often wondered how you got there, Romer."

"Then I must have heard it in a great city, where Zip and I went."

"New York?"

"No. They spoke French there."

"Montreal?"

"I don't know. I know people stared at us and wanted to shut us up; but we ran away to the woods again, till we found a river and a boat on the

shore, with some sailors' clothing in it. The sailors had gone in swimming, and shouted to us, but we took the boat and rowed down the river as hard as we could. It was near dark, and we rowed all night. In the morning we were alone, and we put on the sailors' clothes; set up a sail, and went on, day after day, until we found ourselves at sea."

"And how did you live?" asked Austin, in a tone of wonder.

"Oh, easy enough. The sailors had been fishing, and they left some fish-lines and fish in the boat, and we ate the fish raw and caught all we wanted, till we came to salt water. Then we suffered thirst, till we came to some icebergs where we stayed till they floated down far away. We had plenty of water then, but the ice was always turning over, and at last our boat was swamped and we had to stay on an iceberg till a ship took us off."

"Well, well, that is the strangest story I ever heard," observed Louis Bonnelle. "No one but two—"

He stopped, a little confused, but Romer smiled.

"Two madmen you would say. It is true. I must have been mad. But God watched over us. The ship was bound for Natal and took us there. I was a good sailor, and they were glad to have me, though I never told them where I came from. I was afraid they would send me to prison. We landed in Natal, and Zip and I ran away to the Zulus. The language seemed to come back to me all at once, and the king remembered me as Lion Jim Keeler's partner. I took to catching animals, and when I heard they were at war with the English it reminded me of Morelli's show, which I had forgotten all about in my voyage. I can just remember going out with Zip, scouting for the Zulus, one day, and seeing Morelli's name on some wagons in a camp! We went close up and I saw him. I remembered him, and screamed to him in Italian, 'Murderer, I have come at last.' I threw an assegai at him, and Zip threw another, when the men began to shoot at us, and we went away. After that it seemed to me that I had no object in life but to hunt Morelli and kill him; till I saw him cross a river among some soldiers, and the Zulus told me he had gone away. Then it seems to me I met you again. Did I?"

"You did," said Austin, "and saved our lives."

"Then it is not all a dream," cried Romer, triumphantly, "and I was not mad all the time. It seems to me that I told you to go away, and that I dressed myself in the clothes of some Englishman killed by the Zulus, took all the money I could find—and there was plenty of it around—and went to Natal, where I found that Morelli had sailed for India. I remember taking passage in a ship and having the captain put me in irons on the voyage for a madman, but I got so quiet as we neared India that he let me out. I was always afraid of being locked up in my wildest moments. When I got to Calcutta I had some money left, and I bought the outfit of a cobra wallah; blacked myself and wandered out into the country."

"Did you understand snake-charming, too?" asked Louis, interested.

"There is no branch of taming I don't know, drunk or sober, asleep or awake. But the people did not trust me. They saw I was not a Hindoo from my accent, and I determined to go to Punjasa Roy. I had forgotten all about Morelli on the voyage, and I remember wondering how I got to India one day when I heard a train come by and heard the name of the station called out in Hindoostanee. I knew I got on board and the first person I saw was Morelli."

Austin stirred with interest.

"Do you know what you did there?"

"Yes, it seems to me I let out a cobra to bite a girl Morelli called his daughter. I did not see her in the dark car; but I wanted to torment him by killing his child as he had killed mine. I heard a disturbance and I ran away at the next station and walked back to Calcutta, where I went to Punjasa Roy's palace and he took me as a tamer. I remember taking extraordinary pains to hide my disordered mind. I must have been growing better then; for I had begun to realize that I was not a sane man. I remember trying to kill you once, Mr. Austin, because I thought you were a friend of Morelli's. Did I?"

"You did, till the prince stopped you."

"Yes, he knew I was mad and he was not afraid of me. He told me he would shut me up, if he caught me at any tricks. And then it seems to me there was some trouble. The prince went away; all the servants were frightened and began to steal things, and I let out a tiger on them and drove them out of the house. I had just put back the tiger, and they were all gone, when a carriage drove up, and Morelli came to the door and asked me for the prince—that is, he looked at me. Then he suddenly turned and ran away to the carriage, and I followed him. And whom do you think I saw in that carriage beside Morelli, gentlemen?"

"Whom?" asked Austin, breathlessly; for he began to suspect what was coming.

"So help me Heaven, if I do not dream, if I am not mad now, my own wife, Rosalind Romer, just as she was when I first met her, with blue eyes and sunny curls, looked into my face from beside Morelli."

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE SICK CURIOSITY.

A PARTY of five or six horsemen, mounted on clean-limbed, rakish-looking animals, were riding at a foot pace over the rolling downs of Australia toward the mining town of Bathurst.

All around them was a green country, covered with long grass and dotted with clumps of huge gum-trees, devoid of underbrush, while great herds of cattle and horses were everywhere moving slowly over the downs.

Ahead of them they could see white houses in the midst of plantations, and one of the horsemen pointed it out to the others, saying:

"Bathurst, gents. It's a very different place from what it used to be when the gold-fever first took. I remember when the only house here was the police station and when bush-rangers were as thick as blackberries in the hold country, but that's all changed now, what with the gold and the wool."

"The wool? is that such a great help to you?" asked Albert Austin, who was riding near him.

"I'm blest if it ain't better than the gold, for the mines keeps givin' out, but the wool keeps a-growin' more and more every year. We send out more money in wool than we do in gold as it is, and your Yankees, when they come here, go to sheep-raisin' as nateral as if they was bred to it. There's money in it."

They rode on toward Bathurst and found it a beautiful town with fine hotels.

At one of these our party, which consisted of our old friends and some Australian sheep and cattle kings, dismounted, and the first question put to the landlord by Austin was:

"Has Morelli's show been here with the Zulus?"

"Been here? Yes, and gone too," was the reply. "They took in a sight of money too, and left two of their niggers behind sick. They're going on when they can—"

"Where are they?" interrupted an earnest voice, as Milo Romer stepped forward.

"In my house. The little nigger got sick eating too many cucumbers, and one of the Zulus—a chap they call Balaly, who talks a little English, staid behind to nurse him 'cause the other poor fellow's deaf and dumb."

Austin looked at Louis. They both realized that it must be Zip, and that they were approaching the solution of another link of the mystery surrounding Romer's madness.

They told the landlord they were friends of the show, and he took them to a room in the back of the house, where he knocked and called:

"Hallo, Balaly, here's some friends of yours come to see you."

A moment later Austin recognized the frank, good-natured features of Balélé, the Zulu who had been so comically proud of his broken English, and Balélé himself, after a puzzled look at his face burst out:

"Sabbona, mumbana, sabbona, sabbona! Ow-doo-doo-doo-you-doo-doo? Ow you come 'ere? Sabbona! sabbona!"

And then he burst out with a flood of Zulu greetings, the tears pouring down his honest brown face for joy to see a friend in such a strange country.

On a bed in the same room, his placid, silly features looking pale through the brown skin, lay the dumb dwarf Zip, parched with a fever, and Austin was much affected to find the two in such a poor condition.

Balélé kept shaking his hand and that of Louis in his excitement and talking so that they could see he was telling them something, but he never looked toward Romer after the first glance, evidently not knowing him.

Presently, however, the tamer spoke to the Zulu in his native language, and entered into a conversation with him, Balélé answering in a respectful manner, but evidently as far as ever from knowing the other.

After a little Romer told them:

"He says Morelli left them behind when he heard that Zip had fallen sick, and that he has no money to go on, while the show is going to America before the end of this week. Zip has a fever, and he fears he will die."

"Haven't they had a doctor?" inquired Louis Bonnelle.

"No; they have had no money to pay one."

"Then we must get one ourselves. What a heartless brute this Morelli must be."

Romer compressed his lips but said nothing. He had been very silent all the way from Yokohama, and appeared to be constantly buried in thought.

They procured a doctor, who soon came in and told them that the dumb dwarf was suffering from malarial fever, and that he could set him right in a few days if any of them would volunteer to nurse him.

"I suppose you see that he is infirm in his mind from the shape of his head, and such people are always troublesome to take care of on account of their habits."

"I will take care of him, doctor," said a quiet voice, as Milo Romer took his seat by the bedside. "I owe that boy my life, and I will repay the debt now. Tell me what I am to do."

The doctor gave him some medicines and very full instructions and left him while Austin and Louis Bonnelle retired to consult together on what to do.

Said Louis, impatiently:

"It does seem strange that as long as I could not marry Nina we could always come up with Morelli's show and now that I am at liberty to do what I please it evades us like a will-of-the-wisp. We missed it at Melbourne and Sydney, and here we've missed it again at Bathurst. I've a good mind to go on at once to Sydney again. I can't be expected to wait for the convalescence of this nigger."

"Are you sure that this poor fellow may not have in him the key to a good deal of what we don't understand now?" asked Austin. "You remember Romer did not tell us how he left Zip in Zululand, and that it may have a good deal to do with his return to reason."

"I'm not anxious to know," returned Louis. "I'm not in love with Milo Romer, and I am with Nina Morelli. I want to find her, and I can't do it if we stay here."

"Are you sure whether the surest road to Nina's

favor may not lie in this same Milo Romer, and whether he may not be nearer to her than Morelli?" asked the artist.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that in my opinion Nina Morelli—so called—is not Nina Morelli at all, but Alice Romer, daughter of the man with whom we have been thrown into such singular relations on so many occasions."

Louis stared at him.

What makes you think so? Nonsense. There is no way to prove it, as you once told me yourself when I said she was not Morelli's daughter. Now I intend to take your stand. For my purposes she is Morelli's child, and I know he'll jump at my offer to marry her. I've learned enough of the world, too, to be able to throw all her vulgar relations off when I please. I'll pension them off. But on one thing I'm determined, to go after Nina Morelli at once. I've been fooled long enough."

"I thought you said at Yokohama you'd never leave me again," observed Austin, with a little bitterness.

"So I did, but it seems to me I have nothing but bad luck with or without you; and I'm going to try it alone to Sydney anyway. If I find they've gone, I'll wait for you; for I may as well have company to cross the long stretch of the Pacific."

And without more words the young man, in the plenitude of his wealth, traded his horse for a fresh one and galloped out of Bathurst without so much as eating dinner, resolved to come up with the show he had chased all round the world.

In the mean time Austin went in and found Milo Romer seated by the bedside of the sick dwarf, who was moaning and tossing in inarticulate delirium.

The tamer motioned him to sit down at the end of the room, and came and took a seat by his side.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

ZIP AND HIS MASTER.

"Do you know, Mr. Austin," he said, in a low tone, "I feel very guilty as I look at that poor boy on the bed. Had I been in my senses when I abandoned him in Zululand, I should feel still worse now, but I thank Heaven I can say I was mad. When you went away from the Zulu camp, I had made up my mind to follow Morelli; but the Zulu king would not permit my departure. I had to steal away in the night, and I was chased, for they had taken away my zebras and set a watch over me."

"Zip and I ran on for several miles, still followed by the Zulus, and at last they were coming up, when the faithful dwarf turned and dashed at them himself, fighting with his puny body against the stalwart warriors of the king. And I, in my eagerness to get away, ran on, leaving him to his fate, and had every reason to believe he was killed. Even in my mania, I can remember feeling ashamed of myself for what I had done, and the vague uneasy sense of wrong remained to me after I had recovered my senses, whenever I heard the name of Zip. How he escaped; how he got out, and how he came to be here, are things I do not know yet, till he is sensible."

"And how will you find out, if he is dumb and idiotic? Is he not both?"

"Dumb, yes; idiotic, no. He is simple, but Zip is no fool. He understands me well enough when I speak, and I can understand his signs."

"Does not Balélé know?"

"Balélé says that he came to Cape Town with the captive king Tutchwayo, but he doesn't know how he got there. Balélé was not in the party that chased us."

"No; he was with Louis and me. How did he come to leave Zululand?"

"After the war was over. This Barnes took a lot of them away on speculation. He was a Natal farmer who understood their language. Balélé says they were all glad to come after the war; they hated to stay under new rulers so much. They don't hate the English, though; on the contrary, they seem rather to like them everywhere out of Natal."

"And how will you make Zip tell you of his escape from death?"

"You'll see when he's sensible. We understand each other perfectly."

They sat by the sufferer till sunset, when Zip woke up in a profuse perspiration, and looked round with the curious humming noise he always made.

Romer leaned forward and said:

"Zip, your master has come back."

Instantly the dwarf started up in bed, his face beaming with smiles, and before he could be held back was down on his knees before Romer, kissing his feet and humming with every token of delight.

"Yes, Zip, I'm back. You've been sick?"

The dwarf nodded, then laid his head on his master's knee with a smile of intense joy, as much as to say he was quite well now.

The tamer stroked his head softly, and went on:

"I want you to drink medicine."

The dwarf shuddered and shook his head as if much disgusted.

"But I want you to take it; I, your master."

Zip bowed his head with an expression of resignation. There was no need to speak.

The tamer poured out the bitter draught, and the dumb man drank it with a smile on his foolish face. One would have thought he liked it, and Austin watched him with great interest. As for Balélé, he had disappeared, with true savage indifference, as soon as he found that some one would take care of Zip, and had begged Louis Bonnelle to take him on with him to his friends, Inkomo and Umfula and Uzeffa, who were all with the show.

And Louis had made him happy. So that poor

Zip was left all alone with the master he had picked up in a mad-house and to whom he had clung for fifteen years as faithfully as a dog.

After he had drunk the medicine Romer began to question him, and Austin was at once surprised and interested to see how well they understood each other.

"You remember when you went back to fight the Zulus, Zip?"

Zip smiled, jumped up, and went through a vivid pantomime of throwing spears and stabbing.

"Did they hurt you at all?"

Zip nodded and stripped off his upper garment—he had on a shirt and trousers—showing freshly-healed wounds all over his brown body.

"Did you surrender?"

Zip shook his head violently, and went through the motion of falling down as if dead.

"Ah, you fell down at last. What then?"

Zip made the motion of picking up a burden and carrying it.

"They took you away?"

Zip nodded.

"Where to?"

The negro looked puzzled a moment, then raised his hands as high as he could reach and made a circular motion round his head.

"To the king, you mean?"

Zip nodded again.

"And what did the king say to you?"

The dwarf puffed out his cheeks into an expression of ludicrous dignity; strutted about the room and then burst out laughing in one of his peculiar silent laughs, holding his sides.

"Aha, he said you should be his jester, be with him and that every one should respect you."

Zip nodded eagerly.

"And why was that?"

Zip looked very proud, tapped his breast and made motions as if engaged in a battle.

"Because you were so brave?"

Zip nodded several times.

"Well, so you are. Brave as a lion, for all your little body. Did you stay with the king?"

Zip nodded and then made a motion as if going to sleep, after which he held out both hands together as if they were tied.

"You mean that the king was taken a prisoner in his sleep; is that it?"

Zip nodded.

"And how did you come to leave the country with the Zulus?"

Zip looked round the room earnestly and went to and fro as if searching for some object he had dropped, finally came back to Romer, and knelt down at his feet with a smile of ineffable satisfaction.

The tamer turned away his head, and Austin saw that tears were in his eyes.

"You were seeking for me, Zip?"

Zip jumped up and began to dance for joy.

There was no need of language to explain his meaning.

Milo Romer rose up and laid his hands on the dumb dwarf's head.

"My poor friend, my only friend, you stuck to me when all the world shunned me, and you have no word of reproach for me when I deserted you. Henceforth we will never be parted again. I promise you."

The dwarf grinned, nodded, and made every demonstration of delight, and Romer continued to Austin:

"You have been so kind to me heretofore that I hesitate to ask you now, will you let him stay with us? If you won't, I will take care of him myself alone, and try to get a place somewhere with him."

"It is needless," was Austin's reply. "I could not turn such a poor helpless being adrift, and to tell you the truth I have made up my mind never to leave you till we have solved the mystery of Antonio Morelli's child."

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE NINA'S VOYAGE.

LOUIS BONNELLE, followed by that eminent linguist, Balélé, reached Sydney in two days from the time he left Bathurst, and galloped into the streets of the city like a wild Indian, surprising every one by asking:

"The show! the show! where is it? Has it gone?"

But he found the people of Sydney very careless on the subject. They were used to all sorts of shows, from eminent tragedians down to circuses; and Morelli's coming had not created so much as a ripple on the surface of society of a hundred thousand people. Very few seemed to know or care, and it was only when he got down to the harbor and asked the sailors that he learned he was too late once more; the show had sailed.

The young man was furiously disappointed.

He really loved Nina, and was mad to find her, and now it seemed as if he were never to have any luck. He asked how they had gone, and learned that it was by the regular line of steamers to San Francisco, and the vessel had gone the day before.

But Louis had not traveled round the world for nothing, and he knew the power of money. He knew that he could telegraph to America by a roundabout route, through the East Indies and Europe, to get all the funds he wanted, and his blood was up.

"I'll buy my own vessel and go where I please," he said to himself, and forthwith he began a hunt, with the aid of Balélé, who seemed to be at home among the sailors.

The result of their search was the discovery of a swift vessel that had been used in the "labor trade" to the South Sea Islands, and having been seized and condemned by the Government was now for sale.

The "labor trade" is an institution peculiar to the Southern Hemisphere to-day, and very much like the old slave trade under a cloak of piety and humanity.

Part of Australia, known as Queensland, is suitable for the culture of cotton; and cotton has always required tropical laborers.

The slave trade being abolished, coolie labor has taken its place, and vessels have been in the habit of visiting the South Sea Islands with the object of "hiring" laborers.

If the laborers don't want to hire to white men, the simple process of decoying them alongside a ship, sinking their canoes and packing the natives in the hold without food or water till they are willing to see the error of their ways is that most commonly resorted to; and it was some years before the British Government, waking up to the conviction that something was wrong in the labor system of Queensland, sent out a couple of vessels to investigate the "labor trade," and found out that a very flourishing slave system was being carried on under the sanction of their own flag, right before the nose of the Governor of New South Wales.

Hence a number of seizures, among others that of the Pandora, the vessel now about to be purchased by Bonnelle. But purchasing and fitting out the most handy of vessels takes time, and it was a week before the young man was ready to depart, by which time he was joined, much to his secret relief, by his friend Austin, accompanied by Romer and Zip.

Louis was really glad to see his friend. He was so used to leaning on the stronger will and intelligence of the other that he had felt lost without him, and it was with unfeigned joy that he told Austin:

"Luck or no luck, your presence has nothing to do with it. I know I treated you badly; but you were always good-natured. Stay with me and I'll stand by you for the future, at all events till I've married Nina; and after that there will always be a snug corner for you in our house, if you'll accept it."

With the obtuseness of his careless, and, at bottom, selfish nature, the young man did not dream that Austin had any feeling toward Nina other than sympathy because she was the object of his friend's adoration.

But the cooler and stronger nature of the artist, trained to self-control by the lessons of a hard world, enabled him to conceal his feelings as well as ever, as he replied carelessly:

"I knew you didn't mean to be rude; but I think you'll never be anything but a big boy. What are you doing now?"

Louis told him, and showed him the vessel he had just purchased for a nominal price, because no one else would buy her. He had changed her name to the Nina, and told Austin with glee:

"They tell me she can sail and steam, with a fair wind, eighteen knots an hour; and I propose to go straight through after the City of Melbourne, which is a regular tub and stops at half a dozen places on the road. I've got a captain and crew all engaged, and we're sure to come up with them."

Austin offered no objection, and next day they were aboard and steaming rapidly away to the north-east, pointing toward that circuit of the globe they were just completing.

It is not our intention to inflict on our readers, in the guise of a story, any more information in the geographical line than is necessary to the elucidation of the circumstances which surrounded the lives of our characters; therefore we shall not detain them with any adventures on the way, though a Pacific voyage is full of novelty and romance.

The Nina safely crossed the equator without touching at any of the islands that lie scattered, at thousand-mile intervals, on the way; and in three weeks' time came in sight of the lofty volcanic cliffs of Hawaii, the largest of the Sandwich Islands, where a race of savages has developed into a civilized community, with an army and navy and daily papers, within the lifetime of people who went there as adult missionaries, and when Captain Brown, the genial skipper, announced:

"If you see any smoke, gents, it's the City of Melbourne a-goin' off; but if you don't, we're ahead of her."

They steamed on past Hawaii and Maui, the two southerly islands, and just as they came in sight of the cliffs of Wahoo, on which Honolulu is situated, Louis shouted:

"There she is now! See the smoke!"

A long black column of smoke, the never-to-be-mistaken signal of a steamer at sea, was visible to the right of the distant island, and on their own side of it, too.

Captain Brown took a long look through his glass, and put it down with the remark:

"That's the City of Melbourne, gents, and she ain't got to Honolulu yet. We'll get there after she's at anchor."

"Then we shall catch them at last," said Louis Bonnelle, half to himself, as he gazed hungrily at the distant smoke. "Oh, Nina, Nina, you ought to be kind to me when you see me, for you've cost me a heap of trouble to find you."

"Do you regret the trouble?" asked Austin, in a low, bitter tone, as he leaned on the rail beside him.

"Regret it? No," answered Louis, flushing slightly. "Confound it, Austin, you take a fellow up so for the least thing."

"I was only thinking that if I loved a girl as you say you love Nina—"

"Say? I do love her. Do you doubt it?"

His tone was testy and impatient. He seemed to be irritated by everything Austin said.

"Doubt it? Of course not. How could I?"

"How indeed?"

"Have you not announced your intention of honoring her by making her Mrs. Bonnelle? There's no getting over the fact that you're in earnest."

"I should think I was."

"Well, all I can say is, that she has had a very unhappy life so far, and has kept pure amid a host of temptations."

"Indeed she has. Austin, you're a good fellow. I see you're beginning to appreciate her at last. I'm glad of it, for I always intended you should be my best man."

"Thank you, I'm sure."

"And you used to hurt my feelings very much when you sneered at her. Besides, I owe you a good deal on her account."

"How so?"

"Well, you remember you saved her life in India. I honestly confess I would not have dared to suck the poison of that snake as you did."

"Indeed. Would not your love have given you the requisite courage?"

"Well, yes; but then, you know, after all, a man must think of himself a little, and she had just told me she didn't care a button for me."

"Then you don't love her unless you think she loves you; is that it?"

"No, no. I believe I love her anyhow, no matter how much she spurns me. But then, you know, what would be the use of killing oneself for a girl that didn't care for you?"

"Very sensible. And if you were to find out the same thing now, how then?"

"Oh, it's different now."

"How different?"

"Well, you see, before I wouldn't ask her to marry me, plump. I'd promised my father not to do it. I could only ask her to wait till we got his consent. Now I can say, 'I have three millions of dollars. Marry me, and you shall have everything heart can wish.'"

"And you think she'll jump right into your arms then?"

"Well, I don't say that; but she'll say 'Yes' in a hurry. The girl is not a fool. I'm—well—not as ugly as an ogre, and I'm quite good-tempered, and when you add three millions to that, what more can a woman ask for, Austin?"

"Only one thing that I know of."

"And what's that?"

"Tastes, habits and sympathies like her own. Mark my words, Nina will say 'No.'"

Louis stared at his friend in blank amazement.

"Why? Do you think she's a fool?"

"No. I think she's a woman, with all a woman's pride and delicacy; and I never saw a man so sure of his point as you that didn't get disappointed."

Louis turned red as fire.

"I'll bet you ten thousand dollars to one that she says 'Yes,'" he snapped out.

"I would not bet on such a subject," was the cold reply.

"Why not?"

"Because—because—you will have it. Man, are you blind? Because I love Nina myself. There, it's out at last."

CHAPTER XXX.

THE QUARREL.

LOUIS BONNELLE stared at his friend with a mixture of amazement and dismay as he heard Austin, for the first time, announce that he loved Nina.

"Why didn't you tell me this before?" he asked at last, and his face had an angry glow on it.

"Because you never asked me. Have you been blind all this time? Do you think that any man would have run the peril I did for Nina, if he did not love her?"

Louis turned sulkily away.

"I see, you've probably made it all up very nicely between you, and I am to play the part of the milch cow?"

Austin flushed crimson. The vessel was still running toward the distant shores of the island of Wahoo, and the dolphins were sporting across her bows. Everything in nature looked peaceful and beautiful; but a shadow had come between him and his friend.

"I don't understand you, Louis," he observed, in his most stately tones. "Explain, please."

"I mean that I've told you all my secrets; lent you money, taken you all round the world with me, and now you're trying to steal away from me the only girl I shall ever love," retorted Louis, furiously. "Do you think I can't see through it all?"

"Stop," answered his friend, gravely. "You are going too far, Louis. You teased me to come with you; made me give up my post on the paper and leave Natal to keep you company; insisted on my going with you to see Nina; and I am here, now, by your invitation. I have never asked you but one favor, and that was to help another person, whom we have every reason to believe is the true father of the girl you say you will marry. What have I done that is so bad and ungrateful in all that?"

Louis looked sullenly over the rail.

"You have no right to fall in love with the girl I'm going to marry," he said at last.

"You told me yourself that she had refused you and cared nothing for you. Was I to blame if circumstances threw us together after you had told me you had given her up?"

"What circumstances?"

"The fact of saving her life by hazard. I did not seek the chance; it came to me unsought."

Louis kept on looking over the rail; but it was evident he was relenting. His frivolous and shallow nature was in fact hardly capable of holding any deep feeling for long; and even his love for Nina was fitful and uncertain, as it had proved under alternate hopes and fears.

After a little time he said, but still in a sullen, unwilling way:

"I suppose I was wrong just now to speak as I did; but you had kept the thing so secret I was taken by surprise. Of course you have a right to love her, but I warn you that after this I shall take every means I can to win her from you."

"That's fair," returned Austin, cheerfully. "Let her choose between us. I ask nothing better, and to tell you the truth, I have no such great hopes as you seem to think I have. I doubt if this Morelli would let her go to any one but a rich man on whom he could hang like a leech; and there is no certainty that we can prove her to be what I believe—Milo Romer's daughter."

Louis made an impatient movement of his head as he turned away from the rail.

"What difference does it make, Milo Romer or Antonio Morelli? They're both showmen."

"It makes this difference," was the grave reply of his friend. "If we can show she is the child of Romer, who is an honest man, we shall save her from the dangers which surround her as the reputed child of Morelli, who, as we know, is a selfish scoundrel."

Louis made no reply. He seemed for some reason to have taken a strange aversion to Milo Romer since the tamer had in so singular a manner recovered his reason.

While he was mad Bonnelle had been afraid of him, and especially of the singular, sarcastic way in which he had penetrated the outside veneering of riches and polish which covered the young man, and told him that he was a fool, a spoiled child, and all such things.

Louis was actually thinking as he turned away that Romer might be a very undesirable father-in-law to have.

However, he said nothing on the subject, and the Nina pursued her voyage for another hour or two, when they saw before them the white houses, buried in cocoas and bananas, that composed the city of Honolulu, backed by lofty black mountains that showed in their jagged outlines the volcanic action to which all the Hawaiian group of islands owes its existence.

Honolulu, which, eighty years ago, was a cluster of native huts inhabited by savages, is now a perfect copy of a New England country village on a larger scale, with tropical trees and fruits around it instead of elms and oaks.

There are the same clean, straight streets; the same uniform white houses, with green blinds; the same severely ugly meeting-houses, with square steeples, or no steeples, and hideous "classic" porches; the same rectangular plan, with a succession of square blocks put down without regard to the lay of the ground; the same quiet, decorous population.

The only great difference one perceives is that the deacons and elders one meets have brown skins, and even this is not universal, for there are more white men than natives at Honolulu.

Our friends landed in a boat, and Louis asked Milo Romer if he would accompany them, but, to his surprise, the tamer declined.

"No, Mr. Bonnelle," he said, quietly. "I don't think I should like to do it. The last time I was here I was insane, as you know. Who knows? The sight of the old place might unsettle me again, and before all things, gentlemen, I fear a return to my old state. You don't know what it is to be shunned of all men and to feel that you deserve it."

So they went ashore, passing by the City of Melbourne as she lay at anchor, and noting the fact that her funnel still emitted a little volume of smoke.

"She's only banked her fires," said the coxswain of their boat. "She stops here till to-morrow morning, I guess, and then goes on."

"Then they'll not show here," muttered Louis to himself.

He wanted to ask Austin what to do, but the cloud that had arisen between them prevented it, and so they landed and strolled through the streets, talking of the scenery, and both agreeing that Honolulu was a bore, not worth visiting. Neither mentioned Nina to the other, though both were in reality looking for some of the show-people in the streets to make a pretext for talking.

It may be asked why they didn't go direct to the steamer and inquire. The answer was simple.

Louis, with all his infatuation for Nina, did not want to go openly after her in the midst of a steamer full of other people, and expected to meet her in the comparative privacy of her own establishment.

Austin, who, alone, would have gone straight to his mark, was constrained by the presence of his friend, and refrained from advice.

It was, in fact, a sort of deadlock between them. Thus they strolled in purposeless idleness through the streets of Honolulu for near an hour, both perfectly silent, till Louis broke down at last.

"Look here, Austin," he burst out, "they are not here, after all. What's become of them, and how shall we find out?"

"What has become of them, I don't know. To find out, we must ask at the steamer on which they embarked."

Austin's manner was frigid. The cloud between the two had broadened and deepened.

"Perhaps they have stayed on board?" suggested Louis, as a feeler.

"Unlikely."

"Why unlikely?"

"Because people who have been a month at sea don't usually stay aboard ship in a harbor if they can help it."

"Then where can they be?"

Austin did not offer any remark.

"See here, Austin," cried the young man, in a

tone of desperation, "what am I to do? You won't help a fellow when he's in a difficulty. Where are Morelli's people?"

"If I tell you, you will not thank me for the news."

"Tell me and try."

"Then, I don't know any more than you do."

"And how am I to find out?"

"Ask aboard the ship."

"Of course I can do that, but I don't want all the people to know I'm after—"

"Whom? A showman's daughter? Well, you see I was right, and you don't love her as much as you pretend you do."

"Then why didn't you go aboard yourself, if your love is so much superior to mine?" asked Louis, trying to sneer and failing.

"Because, after your remarks, a little while ago, I concluded that it is best for us to part company, and it is no longer my place to advise you."

Louis turned pale and stopped short in the street as he faltered:

"To part company, Austin? Are you going to leave me for a hasty word?"

"No. But you reminded me that I owe you some money which I cannot pay. I have determined to remain here till the next steamer comes along and thus to relieve you of my presence. You shall have a clear field with Nina for all my opposition. Good-by, Louis."

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE SEPARATION.

AND Albert Austin was inexorable in his determination. He knew that thanks to his art he could make a living anywhere and he could send word by cable—for Honolulu has her cable now to San Francisco—to his New York employers to pay to Louis Bonnelle's representatives in that city the sum that he owed him which was not large.

In vain Louis, who felt lost without him, protested that he had not meant what he said about the money. The artist's pride was up in arms and he sent for his baggage.

"I have thought it over carefully and you were right," said Austin, quietly. "As long as I was able to keep my secret we could travel together; now it is impossible. You can go on to San Francisco with the steamer and have your fair chance with Nina. If you fail you cannot reproach me twice for treason to you."

And Louis, sorely distressed, was yet obliged to yield, and reluctantly sent his friend's property on shore.

Then came the question of what to do with Romer and Balé, who still remained on board the Nina, Romer being shut up in his cabin as if he wished to avoid seeing the land.

Louis, after he had sent Austin's baggage ashore to the solitary hotel of Honolulu, sent for the tamer and abruptly said to him:

"Mr. Austin and I have determined to part company here. He stays at Honolulu to paint the scenery around here and make a picture of the volcano of Mauna Loa. If you wish to stay with him you can do so; if you wish to continue in my company to San Francisco, you can stay with me. Which will you do?"

Romer hesitated a moment and then said in a low tone:

"I have no claim on either of you. I will go ashore and relieve you of my presence. Is that satisfactory, Mr. Bonnelle?"

Louis changed color a little.

"Don't think I want to turn you out—" he began, awkwardly.

Romer laughed a very little, but there was some bitterness in the sound.

"I know I am no great attraction in my company to any one, as far as outside goes, but nevertheless I think that the man who befriends me will not regret it in the end. May I ask you a question?"

"Certainly."

"Did Mr. Austin say that he was unwilling to help me any longer in my search for my child?"

"So far from it that he asked me to give you your choice as I have done."

The tamer smiled in a singular way.

"Thank you. I will take advantage of Mr. Austin's hospitality and go ashore. Balé and Zip will stay with us of course, as no one else but myself knows their language."

He bowed and was about to leave the cabin when Louis observed, awkwardly:

"One moment. It's hardly fair to put you and Balé on Austin now. He hasn't any too much money."

Romer turned round with the same smile.

"I know it; but I have always found poor men more charitable than rich ones. Besides, I have strength and good will, and I can help Mr. Austin. So can Balé. We shall get on."

He was again going when Louis interposed:

"Stay just a little. I don't mind owning I have quarreled with Austin and he is too proud to accept any more from me. Will you do so yourself?"

Romer bowed and then shook his head.

"I thank you, but I owe Mr. Austin a good deal now. If he cannot accept your help, neither can I."

For the last time he bowed and left the cabin, while Louis Bonnelle, alone in his own ship, began to feel very lonely and wished Austin had not quarreled with him.

He remained there till the evening when he saw the City of Melbourne getting up steam and his thoughts returned to Nina.

She must be on board and his coast was now clear in that direction. He had no rival to his suit, and he

did not disguise from himself the fact that Austin would have been a dangerous one.

He sent for his captain and told him to get up steam and follow the other vessel to San Francisco.

The sailor stared and grinned.

"That'll be kind of singular. They'll take us for a pirate sure. If I was you, sir, I'd just go aboard the ship myself and see the folks I want to see and have done with it."

"I don't want to go aboard. I want to find them ashore. They've not been ashore here."

"Then maybe they're aboard yet."

"Can you find out for me?" asked Louis, eagerly.

"Of course. I'll just take the boat and go on board and ask. Who are the people you want to see?"

"The Morelli show. Find if it is on board."

The captain touched his hat and departed. As he went over the side he muttered to himself:

"Of all the fools I ever seen a young feller in love can be the biggest. There's a gal in this case, and them two has quarreled about it. But why my gov'nor don't go himself beats me."

It might have puzzled wiser men, and it did puzzle Louis himself. He did not know that it was a certain guilty sense that he was doing a shabby thing that made him hesitate about facing Nina till Austin was far away.

He dreaded to hear Morelli's people ask after his friend, and especially to meet Nina's blue eyes and have them interrogate him with a mute reproach.

"And yet I can't help it," he thought. "He insisted on going away. Still he's handsome and he saved Nina's life, and altogether it's as well I don't see her till we get far away from him. Once in America I'll press my suit hard."

In a very short time the captain came back to say that the Morelli people were on board the City of Melbourne going to San Francisco, where the show was to be broken up. Some of the people were sick and they had had bad luck in Australia.

"Did you see the manager, Morelli?" asked Louis.

"No, sir, he was down in his cabin, I guess. There was something funny about all of 'em, as if they wanted to keep dark. Shouldn't wonder if they was afraid of the sheriff when they gets back or something of that sort. These show folks are always getting left behind or busting up."

"Was there—a young lady—Miss Morelli, on board?" asked Louis, in a hesitating way.

"I couldn't say, sir. There was a lot of niggers like that Balé of ours, and they all said they belonged to the Morelli show."

"That's enough," said his chief, satisfied. "We will sail for San Francisco at once and wait for them there."

At midnight that night the Nina had left the City of Melbourne ten miles astern and reached San Francisco in eight days after, a good twenty-four hours ahead of the larger steamer.

Louis waited impatiently for her arrival, and was on the wharf to meet her, closely inspecting every passenger that landed.

There, sure enough, were the men of the Morelli show, but none of the Morelli family were visible, and to Louis's eager inquiries he received the answer:

"Boss left at Hawaii; coming on next boat."

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE PROSPECT BRIGHTENS.

WHEN Austin found himself alone in Honolulu he felt for a time rather desolate. He had become accustomed to the society of his weak and facile friend, Louis, and felt lost without the good-natured but rather empty rattle of his late companion.

He had about enough money left to take him to the States but none too much to spare, and he had thrown up his engagement on the paper in obedience to Louis's wishes.

When therefore while sitting alone in his room at the Honolulu Hotel he heard a knock at his door and was greeted by the entrance of Romer, Zip and Balé, it must be owned that his heart sunk within him at the prospect of having three more comparatively helpless people on his hands.

But, Milo Romer came toward him with a strange light in his face, and was the first of the two to speak, saying:

"Mr. Austin, I owe you a good deal of kindness, and I have been the unwitting cause of a quarrel between you and your friend; is it not so?"

"You?" echoed Austin, surprised. "Why, no; you had nothing to do with it."

"Perhaps not directly, but I overheard your little dispute through the cabin skylight to-day and I understand from what I heard that there is a possibility that my daughter may be alive and passed off for Morelli's child. Is that true?"

"It undoubtedly is."

"In that case I am the cause through my child, if this be she; and fortunately we have a way to prove it."

"How, how?" asked Albert, eagerly.

"When Alice was a baby, I tattooed on her right arm, just under the shoulder, the monogram A. R. R., the initials of her name, Alice Rosalind Romer. They are very small, and might be taken for an ordinary birth-mark."

"That will, indeed, be easy to recognize. Why did you do it?"

"It was in an idle moment when our show was at sea going to India one time. A sailor had shown me how to do it, and I had a sort of idea of marking the child in case we were separated by an accident in traveling. But, tell me, Mr. Austin, why you think this girl in Morelli's show may be my daughter?"

"On account of her hair, eyes, features and the fact that you tell me the child you carried away

dead in your mania had black hair. It must have been some other child."

Romer nodding his head thoughtfully, answered: "Rosalind never took her child on the wire in the old show. She was not such a bad mother though she was a flirt."

He said this slowly, and then stood looking at Austin in a doubtful sort of way.

As for the artist, he was wondering what he should do with these two men; how he should feed and lodge them till he got to San Francisco, and where he could get any more money.

Romer seemed to know what was passing in his mind, for he presently said:

"Mr. Austin, excuse me; but have you enough money to afford to quarrel with your friend?"

Austin frowned, and then laughed.

"Perhaps not, but I've done it. I don't care for myself. I've always managed to find enough for myself to eat and drink. The trouble is how to take care of you and Balé till we can get to the States."

"Are you sure we need to be taken care of?" asked the tamer, quietly. "When my mind was clouded I took care of you, and now it is clear. Why not open a show? Here are we three who will cost you nothing and can bring you in money."

"But there are no wild beasts here for you to tame, and I have no money to fit up a place of exhibition."

The tamer sighed slightly.

"Indeed, what you say is true; there are no beasts here to tame. But there is something else I can do to help you. The Rajah Punjasa Roy was my master, and a good one, too, and he gave me something that is worth a good deal of money. I have kept it till now, when it is needed."

As he spoke he drew from out of his bosom, where he had worn it, the little bag he had once shown Austin, and produced from its recesses one of the grandest diamonds Austin had ever seen.

"There," he said, "is a stone that only one man in Honolulu can buy, King Lunali'lo. You thought you were befriending a beggar, Mr. Austin, but you shall find that he can help you yet."

Austin brightened up.

"That improves our prospects considerably. What shall we do—follow the city of Melbourne?"

"Not if we wish to find Alice."

"Indeed! How do you know?"

"Because Balé has been on board the ship already, has seen his countrymen, and they tell him that Morelli and his family were left by the steamer on the Island of Hawaii, where they had gone to see the volcanoes of Mauna Loa and Mauna Kea, and that they will soon come here by the local packet to wait for the next steamer. They must have made money and are going to enjoy it, or else they are afraid of creditors at San Francisco and wish to deceive them in some way or other."

"Then to Hawaii let us go," cried the artist, springing up full of excitement. "I've often longed for the subject of a grand picture, and now I've got it. Mauna Loa in eruption. When does the next packet go, Romer?"

"To-morrow morning," answered the other, very pale. "You think only of the trip, but for me it is something different. The whole happiness of my life hangs on the result of this journey."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE CRATER OF MAUNA LOA.

A PARTY of tourists, including a stout woman, a young girl, and five men or boys, besides native attendants, stood at the edge of the crater of Mauna Loa, the largest volcano in the world, looking down into a fiery lake of lava.

They were not fashionable tourists by any means, for the stout woman and the men had a showy, vulgar look about them, and talked in loud, coarse tones, while the girl seemed to be out of place in their company in her delicate beauty.

It was none other than the Morelli show party, who, having made a fairly successful trip round the world, beginning at San Francisco, were now endeavoring to cheat the sheriff of that county by breaking up their company on the road.

The fact was that Signor Morelli had gone away from San Francisco heavily in debt, and he was apprehensive that if he came back there, bag and baggage, he might find his property attached for these debts and be compelled to pay.

For Morelli had picked up, what with the Diamond Fields and India a matter of some twenty thousand dollars, which his poor seasons at Yokohama and Sydney had not availed to diminish to any extent.

He had this money all safe and was determined to hold on to it, therefore he had stopped at the island of Hawaii instead of going on to Honolulu and had allowed his people to go on, taking care of themselves as best they could. He had paid their passage to San Francisco, "and that was all they could expect," he said to his wife with an injured air when he told her of the transaction and she expressed a doubt as to his humanity.

"They must take care of themselves after they get there. I've got enough money to buy a farm in Kansas, and I'm going out of the show business. It's too risky—and then—"

He stopped here, and even the partner of his bosom could not get him to tell her what he meant by "and then—"

The fact was that Morelli, who had been a selfish, grasping man of the common show pattern in his young days had been growing superstitious, during this, his last journey.

The sudden reappearance of Milo Romer whom he had imagined to be dead in the lunatic asylum of California; the relentless persecution to which the maniac tamer had subjected him; his sudden and frequent visits in various disguises, and the fact that

every visit had boded danger to some member of the demoralized man's family; all these causes had combined to intensify the natural superstition of showmen, and Morelli had become convinced that there was no more luck in store for him in the business of catering to public amusement.

His haphazard encounter with Romer at the gate of Punjasa Roy had completed his demoralization, and when his pistol went off he was convinced he had killed the tamer and that he would be taken up for murder. For that reason he had fled from Calcutta in a hurry, and after that it seemed as if he had no more good fortune.

"When he followed me I had plenty of money and much danger," reflected Morelli, "and now he is gone I have no luck. Let me get out while I have any money left or it will all go."

He had fallen into a nervous way of looking behind him at dark, and began to talk in his sleep, while he always managed to evade the questions of his wife as to what ailed him.

Madame Morelli was a good, vulgar, motherly old soul, who always looked sharp after the money of the office and took the best care of her children. Morelli was her second husband and she was his second wife, he said, therefore there were plenty of things in his life she had never heard of.

The episode of Milo Romer had occurred about two years before Mrs. Garcia met the showman and he had presented her a girl of five years old as his daughter Nina, by his first wife.

Therefore it was to honest Madame Morelli a great mystery "what made Antonio so restless and scary of late."

They stood on the edge of the crater of Mauna Loa, a huge pit two miles across and two thousand feet deep, the show place of Hawaii.

All round the sides of this pit were cliffs of black rock smooth as glass, and, even to the very top, hot enough to scorch their soled shoes all to pieces in a few minutes.

The black cliffs fell away to a black beach about half a mile wide, and this in turn dropped away into a lake of fiery lava, heaving into billows like the sea.

This weird-looking lake was bounded by a narrow ledge of lava and was nearly round with a steep bank.

But the bank was red hot, and the lake was filled with a molten fiery mass, raging and forever restless, eddying out from the center toward the banks, and then rolling back in waves of fire.

The surface of the lake was of the pinkish gray of melted lead, broken by jagged circles of rose-colored flame.

The eddies rolled slowly to and fro and great clouds of sulphurous vapor rose up from the midst, and every now and then the lake bulged up in the center and threw aloft a column of molten lava fifty feet high, scattering fiery spray all round.

"Eh, Antonio, but I should not like to be there," observed comfortable Madame Morelli, as she looked down.

But her husband seemed to be fascinated by the sight, and stood watching it, muttering:

"Ah, Dio! l'inferno! l'inferno!" [Ah, my God, it is hell, it is hell.]

The old woman soon had enough of it, for the clouds of gas that came from there were too much for any person with weak lungs, and beat a retreat with the boys, but still Morelli stood on the black cliffs looking down into the dark cavern and the lake of molten fire, while a pitchy black cloud of smoke curled above into the blue sky of Hawaii and shut out the light of the sun from the Italian's eyes.

Then his knees began to tremble, for he felt the throbbing of the solid rock beneath him, and he saw the fiery lake bulging up with a slow, resistless movement, terrible and infernal beyond expression.

All the superstition of his early training and later associations came over him in that moment, and he seemed unable to stir as his vivid fancy painted in the midst of the fire the man he had murdered, now all white-hot from the place to which Morelli had sent him, coming to claim his murderer's companionship in hell.

With a faint cry he turned to flee, for the gases were choking him, and just then he heard his own name in the voice he had dreaded so long.

It came from behind him, and he wheeled round to find Milo Romer himself or his spirit standing within three feet of him, a stern smile on his face.

CHAPTER XXXIV. THE MOUTH OF THE PIT.

ANTONIO MORELLI uttered a cry of terror and fell on his knees. He thought it was the tamer's spirit come to drag him down. He did not dare look away, or he would have seen that they were not alone, a third and fourth person standing near by, watching them. One of these was a man, the other a girl with blue eyes and golden hair.

Milo Romer remained standing, looking down on the other. He divined the cause of his terror, and he smiled as he saw behind Morelli the lake of molten lava.

The showman's wife and children were descending the outside of the volcano, thinking their father was coming, and Nina, alone near the top, had been startled by the sudden apparition of Albert Austin and a stranger, and stood looking on, not knowing what it all meant.

For some moments neither of the men spoke, and then Milo asked, in a low, grating tone:

"Antonio Morelli, are you ready to meet your fate?"

"No, no," screamed the Italian, clasping his hands, "not yet, not yet. It was an accident, you know it was, Romer. I did not mean to kill you.

Do not compel me to go yet. Give me time to repent."

The tamer saw that the superstition of the other was fully aroused, and he answered, keeping up the deception:

"Why should I suffer in the flames and you not share them with me? It is time I had company. Rosalind is not here. You cannot go to her."

"I do not want to go to your place; I do not deserve it," shrieked the unhappy Italian, who saw himself all in a pall of black smoke over the mouth of hell alone with the ghost of the man he had murdered.

Romer laughed bitterly.

"Did I deserve the injuries you did me twenty years ago, when you dishonored my wife and slew my child?"

"It is not true," eagerly exclaimed the showman. "The child is not dead, and your wife was never to me anything but as one of my performers. I swear it sacredly as I hope to escape from here. Rosalind was killed by accident, but it was not her child that fell with her. It was only one of the animal men's children, a little brat for whom no one cared."

"Then where is my child?" asked Romer, sternly glaring at him.

"She has been brought up as my own child, so help me God. Romer, I never harmed your wife or child except to steal them from old Bailey, and I would not have shot you, only it was life against life."

Romer fell back a step.

"Get up," he said, "look round you and show me my daughter."

Trembling in every limb the showman obeyed and pointed to her who had hitherto been called Nina Morelli, but who now as Alice Romer was seen leaning confidently against the bosom of no less a person than Albert Austin.

"That is she," he said, huskily; "you tried to kill her yourself in India, and you deserve to burn for that, but I never did anything to go there for."

Romer advanced toward him and the Italian fell back pale as ashes, the terror on his face too great for utterance.

Then the tamer stopped and laughed in his most sardonic way.

"You fool," he said, "I am not dead, and this is not hell. Stand up and fight for your life, for I'm going to kill you to avenge the twenty years' torture you gave me."

Morelli had listened to him with an astonishment that changed to mingled joy and anger.

"You are not dead, and you have followed me all this way to fight me. Then I am safe and I will run no more. Take care of yourself."

His hand went back to his pistol-pocket in a moment, but, for the first time since his recovery of reason, the tamer exhibited his tremendous activity anew.

Before the showman could draw the weapon he had whirled him around by a peculiar trick Austin, who watched him closely, had never seen before; and with a sudden push on the back, lifting him off his feet at the same time from behind, he had Morelli on his face in an instant, the pistol flying from his hand on the cold lava and going off in the act.

Yet Morelli was a powerful and active man, at least fifty pounds heavier than the tamer.

Before he could rise Romer had made an active bound for the pistol, seized it and jerked it far down the cliffs on the red-hot shore of the lake of fire, whose fierce heat came up to them two thousand feet away, as if they were within six feet of a blast furnace.

Austin and Alice had been compelled to draw back out of sight of the lake to save themselves from suffocation, but the two men above were so intent on their hatred of each other that they forgot all about it.

And Austin noticed that the heat and excitement had begun to produce a marvelous effect on the lately quiet and gentle Romer, whose eyes were now glaring as they had in the old times, and whose voice had assumed the peculiar piercing tone which had marked it in his days of mania.

"Come, Morelli," he shrieked, dancing about in his old frenzied way, "we've met at last, with none to part us, and none but the weapons nature gave us. Fight, you coward, fight."

The showman, who had risen without much hurt, was already stripping off his outer clothes. He seemed to be desperate like a man driven into a corner as he panted out:

"I'll end this now at once. I'm tired of being hunted by you. I'll kill you square this time."

He rushed at Romer with his brawny fists, when the other darted at him with a duck of the head and dashed his own skull into the bigger man's face, driving him back, battered and dizzy, and missing his blows at Romer.

Then the tamer gave another leap back and began to assault Morelli with such marvelous activity and force that he compelled the big man to retreat, always evading his blows till they came to the edge of the terrible black cliffs of lava, where the foot of the Italian slipped, and down he went, sliding down a smooth incline without the power to stop himself, shrieking for help and mercy at his utmost voice, but all to no use, till Austin uttered a faint cry of horror and Alice hid her face in his breast.

The Italian had fallen into the lake of molten lava. Romer's twenty years of torture were all avenged at last.

CHAPTER XXXV. CONCLUSION.

Out in the heart of the Adirondacks lies a little lake, where every summer a party from the city is accustomed to camp out.

Around it rise lofty mountains, and the zigzag track of a tornado only a few years since has made broad lanes through the woods that clothe them to their tops.

On the lake may often be seen a bark canoe, and very often there is a lady in the canoe, sometimes a baby with her.

Those who remember Nina Morelli, pale, sad but always beautiful would hardly recognize her in this rosy, happy-looking lady who was once Alice Romer and is now Alice Austin.

With her always comes her husband, with rod and sketch-book, now a famous artist, since he exhibited his two great pictures of the "Dying Nautch Girl" and "The Crater of Mauna Loa."

He looks as happy as any man can be who has all he wants and a beautiful and loving wife.

With them into the woods always comes as a servant a black man with a broad good-humored face and woolly hair but with thin lips and a straight Greek nose.

If you were to call him "nigger" he would certainly break your head, for he is a proud Zulu and his name is Balélé.

But though the bravest of men and the best of fighters, Balélé is not afraid of work and very fond of good living.

Therefore he has taken naturally to the flesh-pots of Egypt, and officiates in camp as chief cook and bottle-washer with spells of dry nursing at the Austin baby.

Balélé is trying to teach the baby Zulu for he thinks his own language the most beautiful under the sun though he can now talk English a good deal better than in the days he used to say: "Owddo—do—do—do—you do—do."

These three people—four with the baby—are the only ones that ever come up into that lonely spot in the Adirondacks in these days, but on the other side of the lake at sunset one can generally see a light.

And when the light shines out it is taken as a signal by the occupants of the hut.

They enter the canoe and paddle across to be received with a chorus of whines of recognition from a score of tamed creatures of the woods that live there under the control of Milo Romer, once mad, and the faithful Zip.

He looks much older within a year than he did when Austin first met him in the same place. Then he looked like a man of twenty; now his long hair is almost white and his face has deep furrows in it.

He has begun to think; his brain is no longer a whirl of mad visions, with blind instinct for a guide. But he will not leave the woods, nor will Zip leave him.

Austin has begged him to come and live with him but he has uniformly refused.

"I have a trade which would give me my living if I needed it in the city," he would say, "but I am happier and more independent here in the woods. They make me forget my troubles, and they supply all my wants. Let me alone, children, Alice is happy at last and I'm as happy as ever I shall be now I've got my reason back."

And what of Louis Bonnelle?

Well, it's not hard to tell.

He came raging back to Hawaii to find that Milo Romer had reclaimed his child, that Antonio Morelli had died from a fall into the crater of Mauna Loa and that Austin was going to marry Alice.

He looked very much disgusted at first; but finally made up his mind that there was no use being ill-tempered, and that he might regain every one's good opinion by a generous deed.

This deed he accomplished by taking the whole party, all short of money, to San Francisco in the Nina, selling her there, and insisting on taking them on still again to New York.

Then he bought several of Austin's pictures, paid for them in advance, and enabled Austin to get married thereby, besides sending his wife, as a wedding-present, a house and lot in Thirty-fifth street.

And better than all he did what only a millionaire can do, if he chooses, he made Austin the fashion as an artist so that other people bought his pictures also.

And it is no use thinking that his passion for Alice survived the spectacle of her married to his friend. It did not.

And the more he saw of the life of a rich man in New York the more he came to the conclusion that Alice was not fit to be a millionaire's wife.

But she makes an excellent helpmeet to Austin, the artist, and he is as proud of her as if she had never walked a taut wire or been shot from a cannon.

THE END.

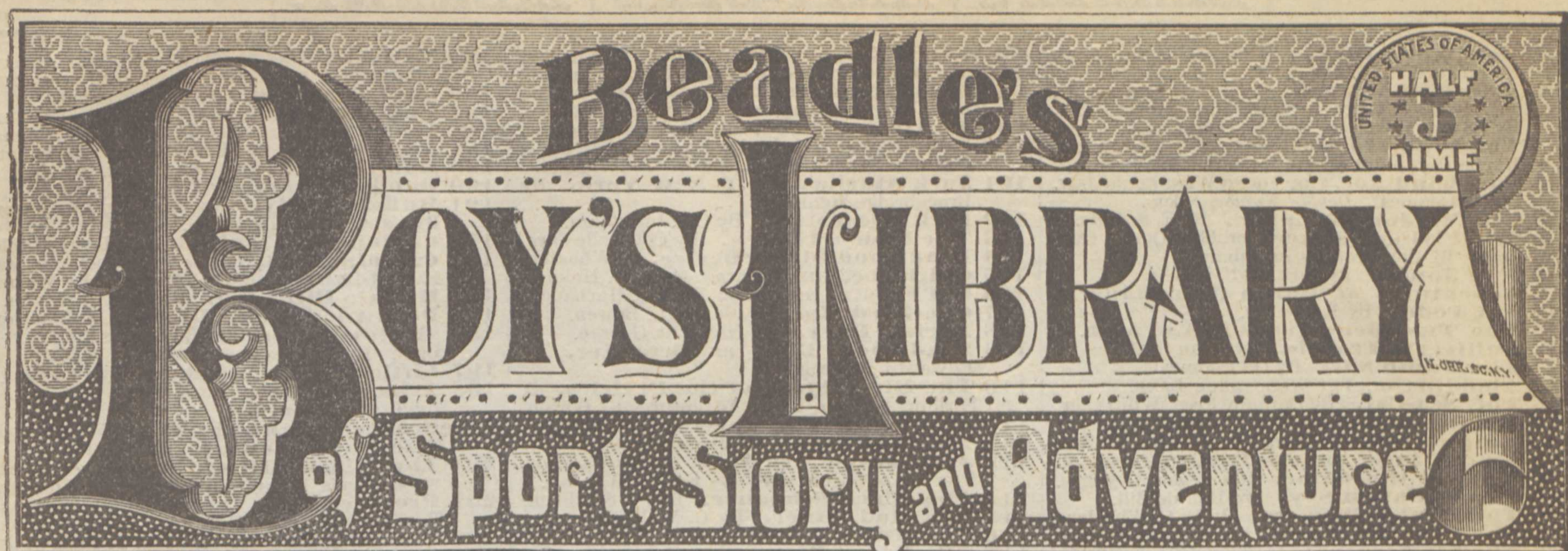
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